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Lebanese English as a Foreign Language
Teachers' Conceptions of Teaching and their
Practice in Lebanese Public High Schools

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Lebanese English as a Foreign Language Teachers' Conceptions of Teaching and
their Practice in Lebanese Public High Schools
ABSTRACT

For about the last decade, education reformers have stressed the role of teachers in translating policy reforms into classroom practice. In Lebanon, the 1997 revised English curriculum, which follows learner-centred teaching, has as one of its objectives to enable learners to communicate effectively in English. To meet such an objective, the reformers called for the use of cooperative learning (CL) as it maximises the learners' exposure to meaningful input and output in a democratic, cooperative environment. However, to date a lot of the graduates from Lebanese Public High Schools (LPHS), unlike their counterparts in the private sector, are not proficient enough in English to produce one complete sentence in that foreign language. The aim of this study was therefore to investigate the extent to which the conceptions of teaching that LPHS teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) have, in general, as well as of CL in particular, are congruent with the curricular reforms and hence implemented into their classroom practice, and thereby investigating one possible reason for their graduates' low proficiency in English.

Using a case study design, the researcher examined six Lebanese EFL teachers, purposively sampled, in four LPHS in one city in South Lebanon. Data, collected through observation, interviews, document analysis, and a researcher diary, were compared to ensure credibility. These data, which were analysed thematically, yielded the categories and sub-categories which constitute the results of this research.

Major findings showed that (a) there were incongruities between teachers' *reported* conceptions and their practice; while their reported conceptions lie within learner-centred teaching, their practice, influenced by their learning experiences as language learners as well as their school culture and professional context, was more traditional and teacher-centred, (b) CL was almost absent in their practice, and in only a few occasions were group or pair work activities employed, (c) their teacher preparation was mostly theoretical and traditional, (d) the minimal support provided to EFL teachers in their professional context and the incompatible school culture with the curricular reforms reflected negatively on their practice.

Conclusions were drawn as follows: (1) teachers' conceptions of teaching were mostly incongruent with the curricular reforms, and hence these reforms were not translated into the teachers' classroom practice properly, (2) the strong influence of the participants' images of their memorable teachers as language learners, coupled with the participants' inadequate understanding of learner-centred teaching, made the participants equate their friendly attitudes to students with learner-centred teaching, (3) the absence of communication and collaboration between teacher education programme, curriculum designers, and LPHS led to inadequate teacher training, (4) their poor teacher preparation and the inappropriate school culture and context in terms of the physical environment, orientation, and preparedness reinforced the teachers' more established conceptions of

what constitute good teaching and discouraged the participants' few attempts to implement traces of these curricular reforms in their classes, and (5) the poor implementation of curricular reforms and the reliance on more traditional teaching, which focuses on form, accuracy, and memorisation, were hence one possible factor responsible for LPHS graduates' low proficiency.

The researcher suggested necessary pedagogical implications that are likely to improve the implementation of curricular reforms in LPHS, the most important of which were (a) adjusting the reforms to be in harmony with LPHS professional context as well as culture, (b) more coordination and communication between teacher training programmes, schools, and curriculum designers, and (c) revising the teacher education programme and upgrading teachers' qualifications. Finally, the thesis ends with recommendations for further research.

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For the spirit of my father, my husband, and my loving children

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

| | |
|-------|--|
| LPHS | Lebanese Public High Schools |
| CL | Cooperative Learning |
| LCE | Learner-centred Education |
| EFL | English as a Foreign Language |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| CAS | Critical Analytical Study |
| NCERD | National Centre for Educational Research and Development |
| ELT | English Language Teaching |
| TTC | Teacher Training Centre |

| | |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| ZPD | Zone of Proximal Development |
| NQT | Newly Qualified Teachers |
| CLT | Communicative Language Teaching |
| PRC | People's Republic of China |
| NS | Native Speaker |
| NNS | Non-native Speaker |
| NNC | New National Curriculum |
| CPD | Continuing Professional Development |
| L2 | Second Language |
| L1 | First Language |
| FL | Foreign Language |
| FLL | Foreign Language Learning |
| EEP | Elementary Education Programme |
| TD | Teaching Diploma |
| MA | Master of Arts |
| B.Ed | Bachelor in Education |

Introduction

This is a qualitative, multiple case study that investigates the conceptions of teaching and the practice of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers. It focuses on teachers in Lebanese Public High Schools (LPHS) in Sidon, a city in the south of Lebanon.

There are several reasons to suggest that the quality of teaching and learning in English in LPHS is not so good as that in the private sector. As a Lebanese EFL teacher at a private Lebanese English-speaking university, I work with diverse types of students coming from different school backgrounds (including Lebanese Public and Private High Schools). The level of English of LPHS graduates consistently appears lower than that of those students in private schools. LPHS students' performance in English on the National Examinations (taken at the end of Grades 9 and 12) is also usually lower than their counterparts in Lebanese private high schools. Comparing the results of two similar local schools, one public and one private, I found that the former had an average of 14 out of 40 for grade 9 and 20 out of 40 for grade 12, whereas for the private school, the averages were 26.2 and 28.3 respectively¹. Obviously no great claims can be made from this comparison. However, it does serve to illustrate what is a widespread conception about the relative merits of the two kinds of high school and to explain the issue that raised my curiosity as an EFL teacher and researcher and which has led me to the research reported in this thesis.

Researching this issue, however, is not so straightforward as the teaching/ learning process involves many elements such as the curriculum, students, teachers and context – and it would be impossible to research all in one thesis bound by limits of time and words. Hence, I have had to narrow down the focus of my research and in doing so have taken three factors into consideration. First, the effect of the curriculum should be minimal because Lebanese Public and Private High Schools follow the same national English curriculum. Second, the Critical Analytical Study completed for the earlier part of the degree found that the Lebanese, government and people, have a positive attitude toward learning English at least for its utilitarian advantages such as for jobs, education, and communication (Saba 'Ayon, 2010). Third, the important role of teachers in causing

¹ Source of these scores is the Education Division in Sidon

change in schools and classrooms is asserted by many researchers (e.g. Prawat, 1992; Glisan, 1996; Connelly et al., 1997; Allen, 2002, and Troudi & Alwan, 2010), yet teachers are the most under-researched element: none of the articles about teachers reviewed in Saba' Ayon (2010) were related to the Lebanese context. I, therefore, decided to investigate the issue of low achievement in English by researching EFL teachers in LPHS.

The research takes place against a background of reforms in the Lebanese EFL Curriculum (see p. 60), but the fact that these reforms have been passed officially does not necessarily mean that they are translated into classroom teaching practice in LPHS. As Glisan (1996, p. 74) states “the only way to realize reform and pay attention to the new standards is by altering the way in which teachers think about teaching”. Freeman and Freeman (1994) maintain that for the teachers to change the way they teach, they need to change their beliefs about foreign language learning (FLL) (p.41). Troudi and Alwan (2010, p. 117) recommend that teachers be involved “as agents in the process of curriculum change” to avoid their resistance to change. Allen (2002, p. 518) states that “if the standards for foreign language learning are to achieve their potential impact, research that investigates what teachers know and believe about the standards is needed”. Connelly et al. (1997) maintain that although “educational reformers were inclined to introduce changes in policy and changes in curriculum guidelines and impose them on practice”, these changes are not likely to be automatically translated into classroom practice (p. 674). They found that teachers’ knowledge is pivotal in this sense, asserting that “to more closely relate ideas about teaching and learning, we need to be concerned with what it is that teachers know and with the knowledge environment in which they work.” These insights have led me to focus my research both on teachers’ conceptions of teaching and on their practice. Drawing on my social interaction with the teachers and the environment, I have aimed to account for students’ proficiency by constructing knowledge which reflects the teachers’ perspective.

Thus, the research has sought to determine the extent to which teachers’ conceptions (knowledge, belief, and thinking) of teaching and their actual instructional practice have been consonant with the reforms. In other words, it has explored whether teachers’ conceptions and their practice match the principles of the current English curriculum. In

doing this, it has looked at the policy behind the curriculum, and the principles and practices which it advocates. Central to this has been the idea of cooperative learning (CL) which is given a prominent position in the curriculum.

By focusing the research in this area, I have attempted to fill a gap in the literature and hence to contribute new knowledge to the field of foreign language learning and teaching.

The aim of this research is to investigate Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions as well as their practice. It aims to look at the extent to which these conceptions are congruent with the curricular reforms and are implemented in the teachers' classroom practice. To this end, the following questions have guided my research:

1. How compatible are Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching with the curricular reforms?
2. To what extent do these conceptions influence the teachers' classroom practice?
3. What is the role of the teachers' prior learning experiences as language learners in their conceptions and practice?
4. How do these teachers view their (pre-service and in-service) education? How does it contribute to their practice?
5. To what extent do the school culture and professional context impact on Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions as well as practice?

In this introduction, I have provided a brief rationale for the research and the thesis which follows.

Chapter 1 presents the theoretical framework used in this research, prominent theories in foreign language learning, and a review of the related literature. This interrogates research on the benefits and challenges of cooperative learning, teachers' conceptions of their role as teachers, the influence of prior learning experiences as language learners on teachers' conceptions, the impact of education on conceptions, and the influence of teachers' conceptions on their classroom practice.

Chapter 2 discusses the methodology and data collection methods followed in this research together with a detailed description of how the data were analysed. A discussion of this study's limitations and strengths is also presented in this chapter together with the researcher's identity, reciprocity and reflexivity.

Chapter 3 provides a description of the context, which includes the status of English as a foreign language, the current English curriculum, and EFL teachers as well as their education.

In chapter 4, I present the findings with reference to the reviewed literature and the theoretical framework.

The last chapter, Chapter 5, presents a conclusion of the whole research, answers the research questions, discusses the research's contribution to knowledge, and ends with implications as well as reflections.

Chapter One: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section begins with a description of the theoretical framework adopted in this study and a review of prominent theories in FLL followed by a brief overview of CL: definition, popularity, and challenges. Then it proceeds to review research articles related to teachers' conceptions and practice.

This review is mostly based on academic journal articles accessed from databases available at the University of Sussex such as SCOPUS and JSTOR. Because little research has been done on Lebanese teachers, it was not easy to find sources that could be of direct relevance to the topic, and the majority of the papers reviewed relate to other EFL or English as a second language (ESL) contexts. Different search terms were used in combination, resulting sometimes in no hits at all especially when narrowing the search to Lebanon as in 'teacher training or education' and 'EFL' and 'Lebanon'. Some of the used search terms were 'EFL or ESL teaching', 'teachers' practice or performance', 'Middle East or Arab Countries or Lebanon', 'teachers' conceptions or perceptions', 'teachers' commitment', 'teachers' satisfaction or motivation', 'teacher education or preparation or pre-service or in-service or mentorship or supervision', 'school policy or requirement' 'cooperative learning or learner-centred teaching' 'school context or culture'. In addition, some relevant books were accessed from the library of the University of Sussex and those of the American University of Beirut and the Lebanese American University besides the collected books from the NCERD in Beirut. I also tried to limit the search to studies since 1990 due to (1) the number of disciplines involved in this review, (2) the inability to handle all the related literature within the limited number of words of the thesis, and (3) the fact that the working lives of EFL teachers have become the subject of research in the field of language teaching in the last 20 years or so. Nonetheless, a few earlier studies were used as they were important to this review.

The reviewed articles are presented thematically; that is, they are grouped into 4 major categories: (1) teachers' conceptions of their role as teachers, (2) the influence of prior learning experiences as language learners on teachers' conceptions, (3) the impact of education on teacher conceptions, and (4) the influence of teachers' conceptions on

classroom practice. In the last category, the reviewed articles are grouped into two sub-categories: the first shows classroom practice as a reflection of teachers' conceptions of teaching; however, the second depicts instances when practice does not reflect teachers' conceptions.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that best fits this study is socio-constructivism because its principles relate to those of Cooperative Learning (CL), foreign language learning, and my stance as a researcher to the construction of knowledge.

Epistemologically, I, as a social constructivist, believe that knowledge is constructed through my interactions with the participants in a social milieu. This knowledge is not imprinted on me but rather negotiated and interpreted through my own "personal, cultural, and historical experiences" (Creswell, 2007, p.21). Thus, my constructed knowledge is likely to be different from another researcher in the same field.

Fosnot (1996, p. 29) defines socio-constructivism as "theory about learning" and Brooks & Brooks (1993, p. vii) refer to it as a "theory about knowledge and learning". This theory is "rooted in the cognitive developmental theory of Piaget and in the sociocultural theory of Vygotsky" (Kaufman, 2004, p.303). Four major learning principles characterise this theory. The main principles of this learning theory can be summarised as follows:

1. The notion of knowledge: According to this theory, knowledge is a "'web of relationships' [between stored and new knowledge] and is constructed actively by learners as they attempt to make sense of their experiences and environments" (CAN, 2009, p. 62). To constructivists, knowledge does not exist "out there in any objective sense" (Cobb, 2005), and thus it cannot be transmitted. That is, constructivists, unlike behaviourists, do not regard knowledge as a product but rather as a process of sense-making in which learners play an active role, through which they can experience Piaget's (1971) process of cognitive development: disequilibrium, assimilation, accommodation, and equilibrium, and during which teachers are viewed as facilitators of this process. According to Piaget, learners

develop cognitively as they seek an equilibrium between what they are exposed to on the one hand and what they already know, understand, and stored as schemata² on the other hand. If the new experienced phenomenon fits with the existing schemata, then equilibrium is maintained. However, if it does not, learners suffer from disequilibrium which they try to resolve through either of the two cognitive processes, assimilation or adaptation (Piaget, 1971). The former is the process of modifying the new information to fit into existing schemes, whereas the latter refers to adapting the existing schemes to the new information. Thus, learners settle any perturbation that might result between existing schemata and new knowledge through restructuring and self-reorganisation of existing schemata.

Thus, constructivists believe that learners construct their knowledge as a result of their interaction with others in their environment. This theory describes knowledge “as a temporary, developmental, nonobjective, internally constructed, and socially and culturally mediated” (Fosnot, 1996, p. ix; Brooks & Brooks, 1993).

2. Learner– centredness: Because learners are viewed as active constructors of their knowledge and not as “objects responding to stimuli” or empty containers to be filled with knowledge (Ellis, 1994, in Min et al., 2009, p. 600), the knowledge constructed by one learner could be different from that constructed by another. That is, “each of us uniquely creates or builds our own knowledge ... based on what we already know, and each idea we learn facilitates our on-going intellectual development” (Knight, 2002, in Reyes & Vallone, 2008, p.36). Similarly, Creswell (2007, p.21) argues that “they [meanings] are not simply imprinted on individuals but are formed through interaction with others ... and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individuals’ lives.” Thus, our prior knowledge usually filters later learning (Jones and Brader-Araje, 2002). Naylor and Keogh (1999, p. 93) maintain that

The central principles of this approach [constructivism] are that learners can only make sense of new situations in terms of their existing

² That is, “their cognitive organisations and structures” (Gage & Berliner, 1988, p.119).

understanding. Learning involves an active process in which learners construct meaning by linking new ideas with their existing knowledge.

3. Collaboration and social context: Contrasting between cognitive constructivism and socio-constructivism, Whyte (2011, p. 223) states that “attention shifts from the individual to the group”. Jones and Brader-Araje (2002) state that “learning from a social constructivist perspective is a process *involving others*” (emphasis added). According to Vygotsky (1978) learning begins when learners are socially and verbally interacting with people around them in their environment, and hence “cognitive development should be enhanced when children work cooperatively or collaboratively with adults and other children” (Gage and Berliner, 1988, p. 124). The “continual interplay, between the individual and others, is described by Vygotsky as the zone of proximal development (ZPD)” which is defined as “the intellectual potential of an individual when provided with assistance from a knowledgeable adult or a more advanced child” (Jones and Brader-Araje, 2002). In line with Vygotsky’s (ZPD) and intellectual scaffolding, Terwel (1999) argues that the *quality* rather than the *amount* of interaction is crucial to learning. In addition, Vygotsky (1978) emphasised the role of the social context in learning. According to constructivists, the environment where learning takes place should be stimulating enough for the learners to allow discovery and exploratory learning. Fosnot (1996) argues that this could be realised when learners are provided with enough learning tools and resources and when “... responsibilities for curricular decisions are shared, traditional hierarchies are diminished, and the dynamics of classroom talk become more democratic” (Oldfather, et al., 1999, p.22). These researchers argue that in such a learning context “students, as well as teachers, are respected as knowledgeable persons who bring important ideas to every learning experience within the classroom community” (Oldfather, et al., 1999, p.22).

4. The role of language: Vygotsky (1978) argues that language is so essential in the learning process that it serves as a tool mediating higher order thinking; it is “the basis for thought” (p. 90). When children acquire a language, they gain a method to think in new ways as well as a cognitive tool to understand the world around them.

Children do not only use language to communicate their actions to others but also to direct their learning.

A child's speech is as important as the role of action in attaining the goal. Children not only speak about what they are doing; their speech and action are part of one and the same complex psychological function, directed toward the solution of the problem at hand. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 25).

1.1.2 Cooperative Learning (CL)

These aforementioned four main principles of socio-constructivism are similar to those of cooperative learning (CL), a recognised learner-centred pedagogical practice recommended in the Lebanese curricular reforms. In fact, CL is a derivative of socio-constructivism (see figure 1.1 on p. 10).

Johnson and Johnson (2009, p.366) attribute CL's popularity partly to being based "on a clear theoretical foundation [socio-constructivism] and hundreds of validating research". Likewise, in his argument, Kaufman (2004) asserts that CL is based on the principles of constructivism; although "constructivism has hitherto not played a visible role in language pedagogy ... notions that are central to constructivism have been integrated into language education through other pedagogical models ... instructional approaches [such as] cooperative learning" (Kaufman, 2004, p. 309). Nunan (1999) also states that when constructivism was applied in language learning, the results were very fruitful.

Students become skilled at cooperating with others, and express their own opinions, ideas, and feelings guided by the teacher. They know how to solve language problems in a systematic way and to decide what language to use in the different situations that their teachers present in the classroom. (pp. 83-84)

According to Dunlap and Grabinger (1996, p. 68), "Constructivists argue that cooperative learning and cooperative problem solving groups facilitate generative learning. Working in peer groups helps students refine their knowledge through argumentation, structured controversy, and reciprocal teaching." Further information about CL as pedagogy, its popularity, and its challenges is provided later in this chapter.

In short, the main principles of socio-constructivism- knowledge as actively constructed rather than as a product, learner-centredness, collaboration and social context, and language as a cognitive tool, all of which constitute much of the pedagogical approach of

CL that my participants were tasked with implementing- comprise my own theoretical framework. As this framework is congruent with the Lebanese curricular reforms as they encouraged CL, foreign language learning (see details below), and my view of knowledge construction, I drew upon socio-constructivism while interpreting the results of this research. In other words, I looked into the extent to which Lebanese EFL teachers were implementing the reforms and hence helping their learners construct their FLL.

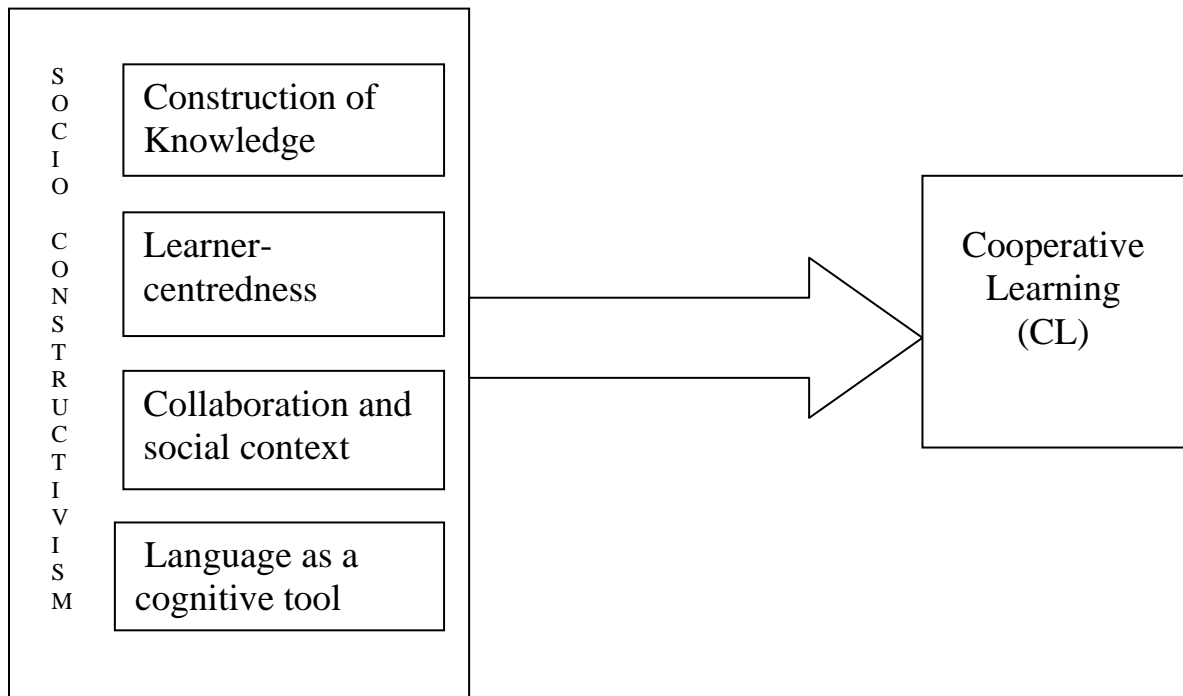


Figure 1.1 Derivation of Cooperative Learning (CL) from Socio-constructivism

1.1.3 Conceptualisation of the Role of the EFL Teacher

As teaching and learning are two faces of the same coin, then to effect a change on one face, a change on the other face becomes inevitable. Likewise, as socio-constructivism (my theoretical framework) and cooperative learning (the recommended pedagogy in the curricular reforms) conceptualise learning as a construction process rather than a product transmitted by the teacher and imprinted on the learners, teaching is conceptualised differently.

To ensure that students are co-constructing their learning with other peers, the teacher must assume a role totally different from the traditional, knowledge transmission role. More specifically, the teacher should facilitate the students' learning process through (1) planning, preparing, and implementing genuine, meaningful activities which are interesting and challenging enough to arouse students' curiosity to learn and which language is a part of, (2) helping students construct their own learning while working cooperatively with other peers of different abilities, (3) providing a stimulating learning environment that allows incidental learning, (4) empowering students to be responsible for their own learning as well as their peers, and (5) training students to be able to assume such a role by helping them develop positive interdependence, individual accountability, and social skills.

In short, when EFL teachers facilitate rather than dominate the teaching/learning process, students are likely to become constructors of their learning rather than containers to be filled with knowledge.

1.2 Foreign Language Learning (FLL)

As this research investigates Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching and their practice, looking into how FLL happens becomes essential to see how these teachers' conceptions relate to FLL. In this section, while drawing on second/foreign language learning theories, I am discussing how Lebanese students are likely to learn English as a conscious activity taking place in a controlled environment, which is the classroom.

English in Lebanon enjoys the status of a foreign language which Klein (1986, p. 19) defines as "a language acquired in a milieu where it is normally not in use (i.e. usually through instruction) and which, when acquired, is not used by the learner in routine situations" and not as a second language which is "another tool of communication alongside the first language ... typically acquired in a social environment in which it is actually spoken." In other words, most learning of the foreign language in Lebanon happens through instructions in the classroom. This distinction in terminology (foreign vs. second) is not always used in the literature, and second language acquisition (SLA) is used to refer to both. Thus, SLA theories in the literature, as well as in this section, might refer to foreign and second language learning theories.

Despite the many theories of SLA, the most prominent is Krashen's Monitor Model (Ellis, 1985, p. 261). Although this model has been critiqued for not adding much to our understanding of how and why SLA happens, that is, it does not explain in details how learning takes place (Seliger, 1988, p. 35), it is considered "the most comprehensive of existing theories" (Ellis, 1985, p. 261). This Model consists of five hypotheses: (1) the acquisition-learning hypothesis, (2) the natural order hypothesis, (3) the monitor hypothesis, (4) the input hypothesis, and (5) the affective-filter hypothesis. Each of these hypotheses is briefly explained below.

1.2.1 The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Krashen (1982) differentiated between acquiring a second language (L2) as a sub-conscious activity resulting from "participating in natural communication where the focus is on meaning" and learning an L2 as a "conscious study of the formal properties of the language" (Ellis, 1985, p. 261). Thus, acquired knowledge is more spontaneously used to comprehend and produce utterances, whereas learnt knowledge is less spontaneous, and its use is controlled by the Monitor (the third hypothesis). According to this distinction, a foreign language such as English in Lebanon is learned rather than acquired. However, the drawback of this hypothesis is limiting spontaneity in language use to acquired knowledge, whereas learnt knowledge can become spontaneous if this knowledge is "automatised through practice" (Ellis, 1985, p. 264).

1.2.2 The Natural Order Hypothesis

According to this hypothesis, L2 learners may follow the same order in acquiring the formal grammatical structures in a natural communication task, whereas in a classroom (an unnatural environment) which requires a manifestation or use of "metalinguistic knowledge", learners may follow different routes (Ellis, 1985, p. 262).

1.2.3 The Monitor Hypothesis

The Monitor is "the device that learners use to edit their language performance" (Ellis, 1985, p. 262). This hypothesis represented Krashen's attempt to explain the differences in a learner's performance, which could be more accurate in some cases than others. Krashen (1982) argues that for the Monitor to be effective, three conditions must be satisfied: (1)

the learner has enough time to think about the rule, (2) the learner is focusing on form rather than meaning, and (3) the learner knows the rule.

1.2.4 The Input Hypothesis

According to Krashen (1982), comprehensible input ($i+1$), a level which is “a little beyond the current level of his [learner’s] competence” and which mirrors Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development, is essential for acquisition to take place (Ellis, 1985, p. 262). Cummins (1988, p. 157) argues that “acquisition of a second language depends not just on exposure to the language but also on access to L2 input that is modified in various ways to make it comprehensible.” In addition, Krashen describes this comprehensible input as interesting/ relevant, not grammatically sequenced, and sufficient.

1.2.5 The Affective Filter Hypothesis

As in Schumann’s (1978) Acculturation Model, the affective factors constitute a major element in Krashen’s Model. Krashen (1982) argues that acquisition or learning an L2 is either facilitated or hindered by the affective factors available in the learning environment as this affective filter allows how much input to be turned into intake. These affective factors can be internally related to the learner him/herself such as his/her attitude towards the target language and/ or culture, motivation, self-confidence or external related to the environment. In a friendly supportive environment, the learner with a positive attitude towards the target language, enough self-confidence and motivation to learn is likely to have a low affective filter which permits a lot of input to change into intake. However, if the environment is unsupportive and full of anxiety and/ or if the learner has a negative attitude toward the language, de-motivated or not confident enough, the filter is likely to be high, and consequently little if any input will be converted to intake.

1.2.6 Output

Krashen’s Monitor Model has been critiqued for not recognising the important role output plays in language learning (Ellis, 1985, p. 266). Many researchers in the field argue that not only comprehensible input but also output is crucial to language learning (Swain, 1985; Swain, 1995; Kagan, 1995, Shehadeh, 2003 among others). Swain (1985, 1993), who proposed Output Hypothesis comparable to Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, emphasises the role output can play in foreign/second language learning. In fact, Swain (1995, p. 128) identifies three functions of output: (1) “the noticing/triggering function”, (2) “the

hypothesis-testing function”, and “the metalinguistic function, ... referred to as ‘reflective role.’” In other words, through their production of the target language, learners can detect gaps or inaccuracies in their output, which they try to overcome by hypothesis testing and negotiating different language forms with their interlocutors until they resolve the gaps. Similarly, Shehadeh (2003) maintain that through their output, L2 learners test their linguistic hypotheses which can be confirmed or rejected with the interlocutor’s corrective feedback, negative evidence, or lack of both.

1.2.7 Synthesis/Conclusion

Because learning a language in a natural, meaningful context is superior to learning it in a traditional classroom relying heavily on “rote drills, pattern practice without context, reciting rules, and other activities that are not in the context of meaningful communication” (Brown, 1987, p. 49), then the best practice to offer to foreign/second language learners is to engage them in “contextualised, appropriate meaningful communication” in the target language (Brown, 1987, p. 56). Meaningful communication involves both listening and speaking, that is, input and output. Thus, both are important to learn a foreign/second language. Citing Nunan (1989), Huang (1995), Liang (1996 and 2000), Lin (1995), Liu (1997), and Lai (2002), Liang (2002, p. 24) argued that “the more opportunities for the students to employ the target language to negotiate meaning, the more they were expected to acquire communicative competence.”

Based on what is presented above, foreign/second language learning requires the availability of certain conditions, the most important of which are comprehensible, rich and interesting input, opportunities for learners to produce the target language (comprehensible output), and a supportive friendly environment. It is inferred then if Lebanese students are provided with comprehensible input in a stimulating, positive environment and with a lot of opportunities to engage in genuine-like interactions, they are most likely to develop a good proficiency in the target language. These conditions are, in theory, satisfied in the Lebanese curricular reforms. Indeed, Ghaith (2003, p. 451), one of the curriculum coordinators, argues that CL was to be used as a framework as it “provides maximum opportunities for meaningful input and output in a highly interactive and supportive environment.” Zhang (2010, p. 82) also confirms these benefits of CL as it

“provides much more opportunities for learners to comprehensible input and output and the processes of negotiation.”

1.3 Cooperative Learning (CL)

According to Olsen and Kagan (1992, p. 8), CL is a “group learning activity organised so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is held accountable for his or her own learning and is motivated to increase the learning of others.” Johnson et al. (1990) define CL as “the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximise their own and each other’s learning” (cited in Johnson and Johnson, 1992, p. 174). It is easy to notice that these definitions embed the main principles of socio-constructivism, namely knowledge construction, learner-centredness, collaboration of peers and social context. CL, as a learner-centred pedagogical practice, is so effective that Johnson et al. (1995, p. 4) state that it could be used “with some confidence at every grade level, in every subject area, and with any task”.

1.3.1 Popularity and Benefits of CL

CL has been popular for almost four decades now (Johnson and Johnson, 2009); its popularity could be attributed to two major reasons. First, it is based (as mentioned earlier) on “a clear theoretical foundation [socio-constructivism] and hundreds of validating research studies” (Johnson and Johnson, 2009, p. 366). Second, its benefits are not only limited to academic learning, but they also include the social and personal domains, which Johnson and Johnson (1992, p. 173) referred to as “effort to achieve, positive interpersonal relationships, and psychological health”.

A lot of research on CL has proved its benefits to the above domains. Some of these benefits are promoting higher-level thinking (Abram et al., 2002; King, 2002), increased task-related interaction among children than traditional classrooms (Shachar and Sharan, 1994), promoting effective social communication skills among delinquent adolescent girls (Rutherford et al., 1998), increasing acceptance of disabled children by their non-disabled peers (Kamps et al., 1994), increased achievement on reading comprehension (Ghaith, 2003), accommodating individual differences in the classroom (Johnson and Johnson,

1986) among others. Indeed, CL seems to have so many benefits that Gillies (2008, p. 329) states that “the evidence of its effectiveness is unequivocal.”

1.3.2 Challenges of CL

Despite these benefits, the implementation of CL can be a very challenging task to the teacher. In an experimental one-year study, Sachs et al. (2003) attempted to explore the effectiveness of CL as a new instructional strategy to replace the traditional teacher-centred EFL classes in Hong Kong. The student participants consisted of 520 Form 3 of both genders selected from three local schools, and the teacher participants were eight of both genders and of different teaching experiences (3-10 years). The participant teachers received some training on CL through a series of 5 workshops given during the period of the project. There were two types of language tasks. The first was prepared by the project team and was implemented once or twice per month, and the second type was prepared by the participant teachers and implemented every week. Although students’ and teachers’ feedback on CL was positive in terms of students’ engagement and feeling freer in the classroom, no significant differences in achievement were detected between the control and experimental group. However, almost all the teachers commented on the difficulty of implementing CL in their classroom. They referred to the constraints of time and the “tight teaching syllabus” (p. 353). They felt that they did not have sufficient time to squeeze CL tasks in their classes and provide students with sufficient input about these tasks. Thus, “many of them were unable to carry out cooperative learning more often because it simply took too long and required considerable time and effort to plan and organize” (p. 357).

Two points are worth commenting on in this study. The first point is about the effectiveness of CL. We might wonder why the experimental group did not do better than the control group when a lot of research (some of which referred to above) supports the effectiveness of CL. Two reasons might explain these results: (1) CL was used as a marginal or additional strategy to be used sparingly during the project (once or twice a week), and (2) the implementation of CL in the classroom might be the other reason. The training that the teacher participants received was probably not sufficient for them to embed CL in their classroom due to the difficulty they faced in its implementation, which is the second point worth our discussion. The teachers reported difficulty in implementing

CL as it required more time to prepare, plan, and design tasks that are interesting enough for the students and that are relevant enough to fit into the curriculum. Thus, implementing CL is not easy as it might seem to be.

Another research study that points to the challenges that teachers might face in their implementation of CL was done by Gillies and Boyle (2010). They investigated the perceptions of 10 middle- year teachers in Brisbane, Australia (grades 6-9) who implemented CL in their classrooms in two units (each of which lasting 4-6 weeks) during two school terms. These teachers, who were volunteers and were regarded as competent teachers by their peers, took part in a 2-day workshop training familiarising them with CL and its basic principles. Through semi-structured interviews with each of these teachers, the researchers were able to elicit teachers' perceptions of CL. All teachers had a positive experience of implementing CL in their classrooms and reported that their students as well enjoyed and responded well to group work. However, when asked about the challenges they faced in their implementation, most reported "concern with the socializing that occurred in the groups, time management, and the organization required to implement CL" (P. 938). They also referred to other concerns related to grouping the students, assessing their learning, creating tasks that are motivating to students, and training students on the social skills required in a group work. Hence, as implementing CL could impose a challenge on teachers, then it is essential that they be trained on how to successfully embed CL into their classrooms.

In an attempt to investigate why many teachers tend to be reluctant to use CL despite their awareness of its academic and social benefits to students, Gillies and Boyle (2011), in a follow-up study, explored the perceptions of 7 middle-year teachers in Australia on the use of CL in their social science curriculum over two years. The researchers categorised their data, collected through open-ended interviews and teachers' self-reports, into three major categories: "structuring groups", "organising groups", and "teachers' perceptions of CL" (P. 67). The participant teachers reported that it was difficult to structure "CL to promote team work, build group cohesion and responsibility, and promote interaction and learning" especially in classes where students are of diverse abilities and needs (p. 74). In addition,

organising groups to include students with different learning abilities and social behaviour was reported as another challenge to some teachers. However, despite these challenges, the participants stated that the implementation of CL in their classes was not only beneficial to students, but it also helped them change their way of teaching and made them feel more confident about their practice.

Although the above two studies have been done in middle schools in L1 context- where neither the learners nor the teachers face the same challenges as those of FL learners and teachers such as interest in learning the FL, proficiency level in the FL to facilitate the learners' higher-order thinking, attitudes towards the FL and its culture among others- their results could be enlightening to us about the difficulty Lebanese EFL teachers might face in implementing CL in their classrooms and the amount of training they may require to be able to implement it successfully in their classrooms.

1.3.3 Cultural Impediments to CL

Besides these above mentioned difficulties teachers face when trying to implement CL, other factors could impede the implementation of such a technique, namely cultural. Although none of the reviewed articles in this sub-section is investigating CL specifically but examining Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and other learner-centred approaches in different contexts, I included them in this thesis for the following factors. First, research investigating the implementation of CL in high or primary schools in Lebanon seems to be absent (at least to my knowledge). Second, learner-centred education seems to be mostly investigated in primary schools, and these articles clearly depict the influence of culture and professional context on the implementation of learner-centred approaches. In addition, despite the different terms, CL and CLT are two learner-centred approaches that fall under the learner-centred teaching end on the two-pole teaching continuum: teacher-centred and learner-centred. Indeed, CL and CLT share a lot of teaching/learning principles with learner-centred education. These principles are (1) emphasising learning as an interactive process rather than a product, (2) tailoring class content according to students' needs, experiences, interests, and backgrounds, (3) respecting individual differences among learners, (4) shifting learning responsibility from the teacher to students, (5) allocating different roles to students and the teacher from the

ones used in teacher-centred pedagogy, whereby students in learner-centred classes are regarded as active constructors of their knowledge and their teacher a facilitator of their learning, (6) balancing power between students and the teacher, and (7) emphasising socially oriented learning whereby students learn with others of different abilities in a supportive, rich environment (Slavin, 1980; Olsen & Kagan, 1992; Johnson & Johnson, 1992; Kagan, 1995; American Psychological Association, 1997; Weimer, 2002; Hu, 2002; Ghaith, 2003; Blumberg, 2004; Dang, 2006; Zhang, 2010). Because of these commonalities among these approaches, the results of the research using any of these learner-centred approaches could be used, with caution, to speculate about cultural and contextual factors that might impede the implementation of some other learner-centred pedagogy, which is in this study CL in LPHS.

Sriprakash (2010), who investigated the success of a child-centred reform programme, Nali Kali (or joyful learning) in a primary rural Indian school, found that such a reform was not implemented properly. Although the teacher participant considered her children's affective needs through the use of songs and friendly environment, a lot of control was kept over what and when to learn because the teacher was expected to follow "a state-set syllabus ...with portions" of knowledge to be completed in each month. Sriprakash (2010, 303) argues that although "Nali Kali pedagogy provided a place for laughter, happiness, and in some cases individual expression in the classroom", it did not change the process of learning as it "was largely understood as knowledge assimilation ... rather than knowledge construction". Referring to Bernstein's (2000) two pedagogic models³, Sriprakash raised questions about the feasibility of implementing competence-based pedagogy in a "dominant performance-oriented culture" (p. 301).

Another example of the influence of culture on implementing learner-centred teaching can be depicted in Westbrook et al.'s (2009) research investigating how two newly qualified teachers (NQT) in Pakistan managed their transitions from student to classroom teachers.

³ Competence-based and Performance-based models: the first model focuses on the learner and his/her progress while the second emphasises the product or the output of the learner as well as the skills necessary to produce this product.

The researchers found the challenges that faced NQTs besides physical conditions in schools were “in-school professional relations and the local community” (p. 441). The in-school professional relations were related to the support these NQTs received from their senior teachers when applying learner-centred pedagogy and the school culture including result or performance-oriented climate, normalisation of corporal punishment and verbal abuse, stratified relationships, and limited opportunities for professional development. The last factor was related to the “influence of students’ home background and community” (p. 441). In other words, children who had literate parents performed better than those whose parents were illiterate. Boys received more parental support on their education than girls as they were culturally and religiously expected to marry early. Such gender and social factors demotivated female students, which combined with the other factors, influenced the effectiveness of implementing learner- centred pedagogy.

Aware of the detrimental role school contexts play in implementing reforms, Mohammed and Harlech-Jones (2008) attributed the failure of teachers in translating reforms into their classroom practice in Pakistan to reformers and educators themselves as they overlook the realities of the contexts where teachers work. The five teacher participants who underwent an in-service course on learner-centredness and found it beneficial did not implement their training in their classrooms due to the constraints they faced in their schools: (1) lack of support and encouragement from head teachers and colleagues, (2) conception of learning and teaching which was syllabus and examination driven and which did not encourage the development of ‘conceptual thinking’, (3) poor and authoritarian working conditions, and (4) lack of follow-up from trainers, which made the participants feel isolated as the university conditions-where training took place- were quite different from those in their workplace (pp. 45-47). These results led the researchers to conclude that “Good plans succeed ... [when] they take into account the realities of the situations in which they will be implemented” (p. 48).

In her review, Schweisfurth (2011), investigating the factors responsible for the failure of implementing learner-centred education in developing country contexts, named four major barriers. The first is the unrealistic expectation of the speed and easiness of

implementation. The second has to do with the constraints of the physical environment and teachers' professional capacity in terms of their training and commitment to teaching. The third and the fourth are related to cultural issues. Schweisfurth differentiated between two types of cultures 'high power distance' and 'collectivist'. The former where "the culturally appropriate distance between authorities and teachers, and between teachers and learners ... is locally deemed to be respectful" is in direct contrast with learner-centred education where a friendly, equitable relationship between teachers and students is expected (p.428). In addition, in a stratified society, teachers might perceive that students coming from lower backgrounds to be less able to manage their own learning. The last factor is related to the agency behind such reform and the power exercised in the process of implementation (p. 429). Because most policy reforms do not "reflect joined-up thinking", teachers who are always "on the receiving end" are expected to carry out such reforms. However, realising these reforms in the classroom cannot be "teacher proof"; teachers' attitude to them and to the "backwash effect of high stake examinations" would impede their implementation (p. 429). That is, if school and teacher reputations are related to students' results on these exams, and if these exams test students on "reproduced bodies of knowledge", teachers are most likely to adopt an examination- focused orientation in teaching.

The following is another example of culture's impeding the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy. In a 3-year Namibian case study, O'Sullivan (2004) explored the implementation of learner-centred teaching by 145 unqualified primary teachers in 31 schools. She found that learner-centred teaching was not implemented due to four factors: (1) "teacher professional capacity at the time of the study", (2) "limited resources", (3) "cultural factors", and (4) "learner background" (p. 585). Although the participants during the interview claimed to be familiar with learner-centred teaching and to implement it in their classrooms, observation data showed their lack of familiarity with the approach and their use of rote teaching. Second, classrooms in Namibia were ill-equipped and lacked the "specifically designed environment with space, resources and small classes" required by learner-centred teaching (p. 595). As to cultural factors, in Namibia, like other developing countries, the interests of the group are emphasised over those of the individual (Bray et

al., 1986), which is in contrast with learner-centredness that values the individual over the group. In addition, as the relationship between adults and children is characterised with respect and authority in Namibia, children are expected to respect, obey, and never question any adult. This also contradicts with learner-centred teaching which encourages children's critical thinking and questioning. Finally, in such societies children are usually familiar with almost one teaching method, the traditional. As such, discovery learning and problem-based learning are unfamiliar to the students, which affected the implementation of learner-centred teaching.

These results led the researcher to question the appropriateness of learner-centred teaching in Namibia and similar contexts and suggested an adaptive approach that would take the realities of teachers' working contexts into consideration and hence "the focus is on ensuring effective learning and using whatever activities, techniques, and skills [that] best bring this about within the realities of the context", (O'Sullivan, 2004, p. 599) that is, learning-centred rather than learner-centred pedagogy.

In corroboration with O'Sullivan's (2004) adaptive model, Croft (2002) found that the "experienced, respected Malawian lower primary teachers" were implementing a context specific version of learner-centred approach which was adapted to the "physical, socio-cultural and emotional qualities" of their classrooms (p.332). With large classes and absence of resources, these teachers used songs- frequent in the local culture- largely to manage their classes, to motivate their students, to keep them engaged, and to build positive parental relationships with their students rather than to teach content. Croft argues that "Learner-centred education means that teachers are likely to develop different teaching styles in different situations ... related to local conditions but completely determined by them, because teachers make choices about the way they use available resources" (p. 335).

Another example about the influence of culture on the implementation of a learner-centred pedagogy, namely communicative language teaching (CLT) which often employs a lot of cooperative learning (Richards et al., 1992), is evident in Hu's (2002) research in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Besides the "lack of necessary resources, big class size,

limited instructional time, teachers' lack of language proficiency and sociolinguistic competence, and examination pressure", cultural factors were some of the main constraints to the adoption of CLT in PRC (p. 94). Hu, who examined only the cultural factors, contends that because CLT and traditional Chinese culture are in direct opposition in several ways, the adoption of CLT failed. These oppositions are the following:

[1] Different ... philosophies about the nature of teaching and learning..., [2]contrary assumptions about the respective roles and responsibilities of teachers and students..., [3]different learning strategies..., [4]different qualities of students [are rewarded]..., and [5]different classroom etiquettes. (p. 102)

Hu (2002) argues that importing reforms and implementing them are ineffective and recommends the adoption of an "eclectic approach" that allows the selection of pedagogical practices that are compatible with the socio-cultural influences of a certain context.

From the aforementioned studies, it is possible to infer that as CLT and other learner-centred approaches were impeded by cultural as well as economic factors, CL, which is another learner-centred teaching practice, is not likely to be an easy pedagogical strategy to implement in the classroom and could be a very challenging task for the teacher if suitable cultural and economic factors are not satisfied. Without these specific socio-cultural conditions in school context - interactive (c.f. Hu, 2002), learner-centred and competence-based (c.f. Sriprakash, 2010; Mohammed and Harlech-Jones, 2008; Schweisfurth, 2011; and Hu, 2002), individualistic (c.f. O'Sullivan, 2004; Hu, 2002), supportive (c.f. Westbrook et al., 2009; Mohammed and Harlech-Jones, 2008; and Schweisfurth, 2011), and well-equipped (c.f. Schweisfurth, 2011; O'Sullivan, 2004; and Croft, 2002) - CL implementation is likely to fail. Moreover, without proper training, it could even be a frustrating and ineffective strategy (c.f. Sachs et al., 2003; Gillies and Boyle, 2010; Gillies and Boyle, 2011).

Therefore, to ensure its effectiveness, CL needs to be properly implemented. This can be done when the specific socio-cultural conditions are satisfied and when the teacher masters the five essential elements or principles of CL. These elements are positive interdependence, promotive interaction, individual accountability, social skills, and group

processing (Johnson and Johnson, 1992; Kagan, 1992; Gillies & Boyle, 2011). Thus, for teachers to develop expertise in CL seems not to be easy.

To summarise, not only is training seems to be necessary for successful implementation of CL, specific socio-cultural conditions seem also to be crucial. Otherwise, implementation is likely to suffer.

1.4 Teachers' Conceptions of their Role

Because teachers play an important role in translating reforms into the classroom, their conceptions of teaching and their role, their education, and their prior learning experiences are liable to either facilitate or hinder teachers' implementation of these reforms in their classroom practice.

How teachers perceive their role has been taken in many texts on EFL teachers. It has been found that how teachers perceive their role affects their commitment to the profession. For example, Johnston (1997) studied whether EFL teachers, 17 native and non-native teachers in Poland, considered teaching as their careers and whether they regarded themselves as professionals. Through life-history interviews, Johnston was able to reveal a great diversity of different life stories. He attributed the absence of a unitary life story to the influence of "complex discursive context in which many occupational, socioeconomic, and cultural discourses competed for dominance" (p. 691). In their stories, the participants reported that starting a job or moving to another was related to either luck or a way to deal with "emergent cultural factors" (p. 696). With the absence of a clearly structured career ladder, poor pay, low-status profession, and difficult economic situation, it followed logically for these participants to consider quitting teaching. None of the participants mentioned staying in the teaching profession as a future plan, so they were committed day-to-day to teaching but had no life-long commitment. Thus, their profession could be characterised as "easy entry, easy leave". In addition, the Polish participants preferred the role of the expert speaker of English to that of the EFL teacher. Because of this, the Polish participants lacked a common discourse of profession. In short, it is possible to conclude that teaching to the Polish participants could be one station in their diverse career path or "employment of last resort" (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007, p. ix).

In addition, other researchers such as Ben-Peretz et al. (2003) studied whether context can impact on teachers' conceptions of their role. The researchers examined the relationship between the educational contexts, where teachers work, and their views of their roles as professionals. Through the use of metaphoric pictures representing different occupations (conductor, animal keeper, puppeteer, entertainer, animal trainer, shopkeeper, and judge), the researchers learned about the role perceptions of 60 teachers in Israeli vocational senior high schools. The participants were working in two different contexts; half of them, most of whom had university degrees, were teaching high achieving students. However, the other group, only five of whom had university degrees, was teaching low achieving students. The participants were asked to select the picture that most closely represents their role as professionals and to explain their choice. The results support the influence of context on teachers' perceptions of their role. Teachers of low achieving students mostly selected the picture of animal keeper, representing a caring image. Those participants viewed their role as more caring than teaching. However, their counterparts mostly selected the image of the conductor, representing a leader responsible with the other members of the orchestra (students) for a successful performance. Neither groups chose the images of animal trainer and judge possibly due to the negative connotation conveyed by these two images, "control and judgment" (p. 282) and the participants' attempt to project a more "idealistic view of teaching" (p. 286).

In the above study, another reason responsible for the discrepancy between the two groups' views could be the academic difference between the two groups of the teachers. It is likely that the teachers with no university degree felt that they lacked content knowledge to convey to their students, an issue which made it justifiable for them to give up their teaching role and replace it with a caring role especially because of their students' many social problems as the participants stated.

Still other researchers were interested in finding out about the role EFL teachers perceive of themselves. Zapata & Lacorte (2007), in the first part of a 2-year study, investigated the conceptions that 64 L2 Spanish and EFL pre-service and in-service teaching assistants and

instructors had of L2 teachers and learners. These teachers, of multiple nationalities (American, Spanish, Colombian, Argentinean, Mexican, Italian, and Brazilian, among others), were pre-service and adjunct instructors at 2 American state universities, EFL teachers in Argentina, and native Spanish teachers at a private language school for international students in Barcelona. The results, collected through a questionnaire, show that almost all teachers except for the EFL group in Argentina used the same metaphor of cultural transmission. The teacher was viewed as a “gate keeper of knowledge”, “bridge”, “open door”, “conduit”, and “transmitter” and the learner as a “receptor”, “voyager”, “person with a thirst or an open mind”, “sponge”, and “empty bottle” (pp. 525-528). Instruction was viewed as unidirectional from the teacher to the students. In other words, learners were viewed as passive recipients of knowledge. Only a small group of teachers (experienced EFL teachers in Argentina) viewed the teacher as a “facilitator”, “parent”, and “entertainer” (p. 530). To these teachers, instruction was more learner-centred, and the learner had an active role in the learning/teaching process. Therefore, these teachers presumably would have a more positive, congruent view of CL.

Although the above results show that most of the participants had the same conceptualisations despite differences in experience, cultural and academic background, I consider that these results support the impact of relatively long experience (10 years or more), education, and prior learning experience on the positive attitude to and practice in learner-centred teaching. As to the experience, those whose metaphors were related to learner-centredness were the most experienced, and had received more training and preparation than the other participants. The influence of “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975)- discussed in the next section- is clearly evidenced as those teachers with no or little experience and exposure to the same western educational system had the same metaphor based on their experience as language learners themselves. Thus, teachers’ training and their learning experiences as language learners impact on their role as EFL/ L2 teachers.

Although the following study is about science teachers’ perceptions, it is included in this review as it differentiates between teachers’ perceived role and their willingness to assume

such a role in their practice. Su Luan et al. (2010) explored teachers' perceptions of their pedagogical role when their science laboratory sessions were equipped with computers. The participants were 209 science teachers randomly selected from secondary schools in Malaysia. Using a 12-item questionnaire, the researchers found that the participants perceived their pedagogical role "to be more student-centred and viewed their role as more of a facilitator than being the sole authority of information dissemination" (p. 391). The results also indicate that the participants "may only be moderately ready to assume" (p.391) the new role in their classroom practice as instructional change is usually slow. Thus, their perceived role is not realised in their actual practice. Aware of the benefits of learner-centred teaching, these participants claimed to have such a role. However, aware of the demands this role places on them in terms of preparing and giving up some of their authority too, they were not enthusiastic about implementing it in their classroom. Thus, it becomes essential to differentiate between teachers' perceived role of themselves as EFL teachers and the actual role they play in their classrooms.

Significant is not only how the teachers' role is interpreted by researchers but how Lebanese EFL teachers themselves perceive their role. Whether they view themselves as a provider of knowledge, "a-sage-on-the-stage", or a facilitator, a "guide-on-the-side", (Cifuentes, 1996, p. 4) is likely to impact on their conceptions of teaching, commitment, and probably their classroom practice.

1.5 The Influence of Prior Learning Experiences

As to the second category, a lot of research has shown that prior language learning experiences as pupils constitute an important factor influencing the development of teachers' conceptions of teaching. Borg (2003), referring in his review to Freeman (1992), Johnston (1994), Almarza (1996), Bailey et al. (1996), Numrich (1996), Golombek (1998), Richards and Pennington (1998), Farrell (1999) among others, confirmed the impact of prior experiences in language learning on "what language teachers think, know, believe, and do" (p.81). Borg (2003) asserts that

Teachers' prior language learning experiences establish cognitions about learning and language learning which form the basis of their initial conceptualisations of L2

teaching during teacher education, and which may continue to be influential throughout their professional lives. (p.88)

The influence of prior knowledge on teachers' conceptions was also confirmed by Calderhead and Robson (1991) who investigated (1) the knowledge that student teachers have of teaching and learning prior to joining a teacher education programme, (2) how this knowledge impacts on what they learn through their coursework, and (3) how this prior knowledge relates to their reflection of their own teaching and evaluation of other teachers' practices. 12 primary student teachers were followed through the first year of a B.Ed course in a college of education in the north of England with the participants interviewed on four occasions, but complete sets of data only being created for 7 teachers. Student teachers' knowledge was reported in terms of the different images these teachers had of teaching. Some images were episodic, referring to one event or a person. However, others were conceptualised from several events or experiences. Another difference was in their kind and impact on the student teachers. Several images were negative; they represented student teachers remembering their own teachers "as unsympathetic, intolerant, impatient" (p. 4). However, other images were positive, representing student teachers recalling good teachers. In visualising themselves as teachers, the participants identified themselves to be more like the good teachers in these positive images; they linked the image to a particular personality trait of their own such as "creative abilities" and "patience with young children" (p. 4). As to the impact of teachers' prior knowledge on their own as well as others' classroom practices, the images of teaching also acted as a framework against which they evaluated their own and others' practices. One common feature of *all* the images is their inflexibility; they are restricted, rigid and insensitive. Thus,

Students tended to see images as recipes to be implemented as they lacked the knowledge or skills to adapt, question, modify either before or during their enactment. (p. 6)

Another example depicting the influence of apprenticeship of observation on teachers' conceptions was evident in Wardord and Reeves' (2003) qualitative study which examined the preconceptions pre-service (novice) teachers have about teaching English. The participants who were both native speakers (6 NS) and non-native speakers (3 NNS) selected from a TESOL preparation programme in the US had formed very little

experience as a student teacher and were of both genders. Using long interviews, the researchers found that pre-service teachers had preconceptions about English language teaching and were in favour of a communicative approach to teaching. However, the majority of NNS visualised themselves teaching while drawing upon the same traditional methods their own teachers used to implement in their classrooms. Hence, the influence of their prior learning experiences as language learners was more powerful on the NNS conceptions of teaching than their education.

The aforementioned studies support the idea that student teachers come to teacher education programme with prior knowledge or an “apprenticeship of observation” (Lortie, 1975) and not as a “tabula rasa”. Such knowledge impacts on what they learn and how they interpret their own and others’ instruction. It was important then to investigate the extent to which Lebanese EFL teachers’ prior learning experiences influence their conceptions of teaching.

1.6 Teachers’ Conceptions and Teachers’ Education

As to the third category, the impact of teacher education on teachers’ conceptions has raised a lot of controversy among teacher educators. For example, Borg (2003), in his review, finds contrasting results about the impact of teacher education on teacher conceptions (which Borg refers to as cognition⁴). The effect of teacher education on teacher conceptions seems not to be unified among all trainees, and the nature of this impact seems to vary across studies (p. 89). The first group of the studies reviewed by Borg confirms this impact (Richards, Ho, & Giblin, 1996; Almaraz, 1996; Freeman, 1993; Sendan & Roberts, 1998; Cabaroglu & Roberts, 2000; MacDonald, Badger & White, 2001), whereas he refers to another group, fewer in number, which does not confirm the influence of teacher education on teacher conceptions (Kagan, 1992; Peacock, 2001).

In an attempt to explain this contradiction, Borg (2003) suggests the difference in focus and different data-collection instruments in each group of the above studies. The first group employed qualitative methods, whereas the other used a quantitative method,

⁴ defined as “what teachers think, know, and believe, and the relationships of these constructs to what teachers do in the language teaching classroom” (Borg, 2003, p. 81)

namely the questionnaire. One reason for this contradiction could be related to the limitations of the survey, such as misinterpretation of the items, close ended answers, and inability of probing among others. The group that claimed the ineffectiveness of teacher education in changing student teachers' conceptions focused on "the *content* of these [conceptions]" (p.91), i.e., what teachers thought. However, the other group of studies, which supported the effectiveness of teacher education on teachers' conceptions, focused on "the *processes* and the *structure* of cognitive development", i.e., the ways in which constructs are organised into a whole system of construction (p.91). What can be understood from Borg's analysis is that the impact of teacher education on student teachers' personal existing theories of teaching is negligible, whereas teacher education programmes can influence teachers' conceptions through the addition of new constructs, reordering of the existing constructs to accommodate the new ones, and renaming of constructs. This might justify why teachers, despite their training on progressive teaching methods, resort in their classroom practice to traditional outdated methods which are likely to exist in their personal theories (c.f. Wardord & Reeves, 2003; Calderhead & Robnson, 1991). Borg recommends that future research focus on the content, structure, and processes of teachers' cognitive development.

The influence of teacher education was evident in other research too. For example, although teacher education did not impact on the NNS teachers' personal existing theories of teaching in Wardord & Reeves's (2003) study, it added new constructs to their conceptions, which were reflected through the "folklinguistic theories" taken from expert systems in the coursework. Most participants' (NS and NNS) speeches were full of learner-centredness terms and constructivist theory, thus reflecting student teachers' learning. In addition, Freeman's (1991) longitudinal study supports the effect of education (in-service graduate course) on 4 foreign language teachers' conceptions of their practice in the US. Using semi open-ended interviews, document analysis of the participants' written work, and observation, Freeman found that these teachers' thinking had developed. Through their course, the participants were able to develop a discourse which helped them organise their thinking about their teaching and which provided them with "a means to articulate explanations and thus to construct understandings of their practice" (p. 425).

To determine the impact of education on teachers' conceptions of their professional role, Hattingh and de Kock (2008), in a 2-phase data-collection study, investigated the role perceptions of 34 student teachers: (1) when they joined a one-year postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE) programme in South Africa and (2) after the completion of the programme that was described as an experience-rich teacher education programme⁵. Through the use of visual collages, the student teachers used metaphoric images to explain their own perceptions. The results show that student teachers' perceptions of their professional role change as a result of this experience-rich teacher education programme. This experience challenged the traditional role (knowledge provider) most participants seemed to have before joining the programme and replaced it with a new view of teaching as helping learners "to access, evaluate, and generate knowledge from both internal and external resources" rather than to convey Knowledge (p. 330). This change in the participants' conceptions of their role supports the influence of teacher education on teachers' conceptions. The results of this study also support the influence of apprenticeship of observation on teachers' conceptions of their role as demonstrated in the metaphors the participants chose before joining the programme. Similar to other inexperienced participants (c.f. Zapata and Lacorte, 2007), the participants at first viewed their role mainly as knowledge provider, representing the traditional methods of teaching through which they were probably taught the foreign language.

In a recent study in Lebanon, Nabhani and Bahous (2010) investigated the views of Lebanese teachers in private schools on their in-service training or what the researchers call "Continuing Professional Development (CPD) ... in the absence of centralized requirements in Lebanon and of systematic process in many private schools" (p. 207). The participating private schools were purposefully selected on the basis of personal and professional contacts with the researchers. Results were collected through a questionnaire, which was completed by 739 respondents. The questionnaire items consisted of closed-

⁵ "60% of the programme time is allocated to school -based experiences and 40% of the time to a university-based component" (Hattingh and de Kock, 2008, p. 322).

ended as well as open-ended questions through which the researchers hoped to elicit the participants' perceptions of "how CPD influences their self-satisfaction and professional identity", and how these CPD are relevant to their profession (p. 231). Results, which were analysed quantitatively and qualitatively, were presented in themes. The participants have different perceptions of the importance of CPD. The majority of them (70%) perceive it as important for beginning and scientific-subject teachers, whereas only 30% of them perceive it as such to all teachers. Thus, it seems that the participants and their coordinators "tend to relate professional development to their classroom needs, whether to improve their teaching methods or their students' academic results ... [rather than as] a proactive process" (p. 218). According to the participants, their CPD consisted mainly of workshops which the participants complained about as being fragmented, inapplicable in the classroom in terms of time and space constraints, and inconvenient as they are almost always scheduled after a school day. Another complaint voiced by the participants was about the lack of follow-up by supervisors or experienced colleagues on applying what had been learnt. The researchers indicated that "more structured and systematic CPD for all teachers with a focus on action research and mentoring" is needed and recommended that "policy makers stipulate mandatory CPD for all teachers" (p. 207). The importance of this study lies in being the first, to my knowledge, to explore Lebanese teachers' views on their professional development. Although this study investigates teachers' CPD in Lebanese private schools, it informs us about the status of CPD in the Lebanese private sector (unsystematic and optional). Besides it reflects teachers' dissatisfaction with CPD as it is fragmented, inconvenient, inapplicable, and not followed up in the classroom. If this is the situation in Lebanese private schools, which usually recruit the best candidate teachers and compete to upgrade their teachers to maintain good students' results and hence good reputation, one wonders what the situation is like in LPHS, teachers' CPD and their conceptions of it.

To sum up, although teacher education has impacted teachers' conceptions in some contexts (c.f. Freeman, 1991; Borg, 2003; Wardord & Reeve, 2003; Hattingh & de Kock, 2008), we cannot assume that such an impact is true to Lebanese EFL teachers. Thus, it

was interesting to find how influential the education (pre-service and in-service) Lebanese EFL teachers receive was on their conceptions of teaching.

1.7 Teachers' Conceptions and Their Classroom Practice

As to the fourth category, teachers' conceptions of teaching are liable to play an important role in the quality of teachers' practice. Quoting Foss & Kleinsasser (1996), Borg (2003) describes the relationships between teacher cognition and classroom practice as "symbiotic" (p.91). In his review, Borg refers to many studies that focus on how teachers' cognitions shape and are shaped by teachers' classroom practices (Breen, 1991; Johnston, 1992a; Nunan, 1992; Freeman, 1993; Richards, 1996; Gatbonton, 1999; Crookes & Arakaki, 1999). The proceeding research studies are some that investigate the effect of teachers' conceptions of teaching on practice in different contexts. Based on their results, these reviewed studies are presented in two sub-headings: (1) Teachers' conceptions influencing their practice, and (2) incongruence between teachers' conceptions and their practice.

1.7.1 Teachers' Conceptions Influencing their Practice

Golombek (1998) studied the characteristics of the personal practical knowledge⁶ of 2 in-service ESL teachers in an education programme in the US and the way this knowledge influences their practice. Through using multiple instruments- observation, after class interviews, semi-structured interviews, a videotape of one classroom, and a stimulus recall report of the videotapes, Golombek arrived at the following conclusions. First, L2 teachers' personal practical knowledge is characterised as "personally relevant, situational, oriented toward practice, dialectical, dynamic as well as moralistic, emotional, and consequential" (p. 452). Second, Golombek found that teachers' practical knowledge informed their practice in 2 ways: (1) "by serving as a kind of interpretive framework through which they made sense of their classrooms as they recounted their experiences and made this knowledge explicit" and (2) "by giving physical form to practice; it is teachers' knowledge in action." (p. 459)

⁶ Another used term for conceptions

Another example of the impact of teachers' conceptions on their practice is Guskey's (1988) quantitative study. The researcher explored the relationship between some teacher perceptions- which are common among good teachers, that is self-efficacy, teaching affect, and teaching self-concept- and teacher attitudes towards the implementation of an instructional innovation namely mastery learning. 114 experienced primary and secondary school teachers from different school districts in the US completed the questionnaire given after a one-day staff development programme introducing the new instructional practice. The results show a significant positive relationship between teachers' perceptions and their attitudes toward the implementation of a new teaching practice. In other words, teachers who liked teaching, who believed in their teaching abilities and who had enough self-confidence in helping all the students seemed to be the first and most enthusiastic to implement the new teaching practice. However, the least receptive of the new instructional programme were the teachers who had low self-efficacy, disliked teaching and did not perceive themselves as effective in their classrooms. Thus, Guskey (1988) concluded, more effective teachers may simply be more receptive and more open to change and to new ideas.

In a similar study, Stein and Wang (1988) aimed to examine the relationship between (1) teacher success in implementing new instructional practices, (2) teacher perceptions of self-efficacy for implementing the practices, and (3) teacher-perceived value of the new practice. Using a quantitative, positivist approach, they studied 14 teachers from 3 public primary schools. The participants, all female, were of different age and experience. The results supported the researchers' hypothesis and Gusky's (1988) study. Successful programme implementation by teachers was significantly related to their perceptions of self-efficacy and a high teacher perceived value of the new instructional practice. Despite the limited sample size and gender and the utilization of one instructional practice, these results could be used to provide us with insights into the relationship between positive teachers' perceptions and their positive attitude to implement new ideas as long as teachers perceive these ideas as effective and useful in their classrooms. In other words, unless these teachers perceive the new ideas as helpful, they are not likely to implement them in their classroom practice.

To sum up, teachers' conceptions are likely to impact on their practice when teachers (1) have a positive attitude towards the new method, (2) have enough self-confidence in their ability to help their students (self-efficacy), and (3) perceive the new method as valuable to students' learning.

1.7.2 Incongruence between Teachers' Conceptions and their Practice

The reviewed articles in this section depict instances when teachers' practice is incongruent with their conceptions. Karavas-Doukas (1996) investigated the attitude of Greek EFL teachers towards the communicative approach, a learner-centred approach similar to CL (as discussed earlier). 14 Greek EFL public secondary teachers were surveyed with an attitude scale, observed and interviewed. The results show a discrepancy between teachers' responses on the attitude scale, their actual classroom behaviour, and their answers during the interview. Although almost all the teachers' attitudes (except one) were in favour of the communicative approach, their performance was mainly based on traditional approaches focusing on form and structure rather than communication. In depth analysis of teachers' responses showed that the discrepancy was due to teachers' (1) inconsistent answers to favourable and unfavourable statements on the scale, (2) lack of understanding of the principles of the communicative approach, and (3) inability sometimes to see the practical value of these principles in their classrooms. Thus, Karavas-Doukas concluded that teachers' perceptions of the new technique as valuable are pivotal to the successful implementation of the new approach.

Likewise, Razmjoo and Riazi's (2006) twofold study aimed to investigate (1) Iranian EFL teachers' attitudes in public and private high schools towards communicative language teaching (CLT) and (2) the extent to which these teachers "materialise" and "substantiate" their beliefs about (CLT) in their classrooms. Using the attitude scale developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996), they surveyed 100 male and female teachers in both public and private contexts. The participants had a minimum BA degree in linguistics, teaching English, and English literature with a teaching experience between 5 and 28 years. Sixty teachers were observed. The results show that the teachers in both contexts had positive attitudes towards the principles of CLT; however, their performance in the classroom was

different. Teachers' performance in public schools did not reflect CLT principles. In fact, the majority of these teachers in public schools stated that CLT principles are "impractical if not impossible" (p. 351), whereas teachers in private schools "materialise a large number of CLT factors" (p. 356). Thus, EFL classrooms in public schools did not reflect teachers' beliefs while in private schools, there was a match between teachers' beliefs and their practice. Based on what was presented earlier in the section on cultural impediments to learner-centred teaching, it seems logical to infer that Iranian teachers in public schools might have found CLT as impractical for the following reasons: (1) their insufficient training on the use of CLT, (2) the number and the proficiency of students in their classrooms, and/or (3) the appropriateness of the physical environment in their classrooms. Hence, the authors' conclusion, "much of what Iranian teachers said about their difficulties in using communicative activities is common to many parts of the world" (p. 359) seems to be logical as long as the teachers in other contexts face the same challenges and have similar attitudes towards CLT as those faced and had by the Iranian public school teachers. Reading this study made me wonder about the attitudes Lebanese EFL teachers in LPHS have towards the curricular reforms, the challenges they face in their implementation of these reforms, and the extent to which their classroom practices reflect their conceptions.

Another example that depicts incongruence between teachers' conception and their practice is presented in Fung and Chow (2001). The researchers investigated what images of teaching pre-service teachers hold and whether their practice is congruent with these pedagogical images. Using a questionnaire administered on 59 first-year student teachers in Hong Kong before and after their practicum, the researchers found that these teachers' images lay within learner-centredness (nurturing image), whereas their classroom practice was more teacher-centred (transmission and apprenticeship). The authors suggested that this incongruence could be due to "supervising teachers and classroom characteristics" (p. 320) because a similar incongruence exists between the university teachers' images and their classroom practice. Quoting Graham et al. (1993), the researchers recommended that teacher educators help student teachers transfer their learning into their classrooms by making teacher educators' images explicit and "display classroom practices that accurately reflect these pedagogical images" (p. 320).

Although the following research was done on art teaching, it was included in this review as it could serve as another example examining the influence of teachers' conceptions of teaching on their practice. Lam & Kember (2006) explored the relationship between conceptions of teaching and approaches to teaching among 18 secondary school art teachers in Hong Kong. The participants were of different age, experience, and gender. The results show that approaches to teaching are likely to be derived from teachers' conceptions as long as the impact of contextual influences (such as school policy and external examination syllabi) is minimal. Otherwise, teachers are likely to face tensions caused by the incongruities between their principles and the institutional policies and norms.

When teachers have limited contextual influence on the way they teach, as happens in higher education and in art teaching in lower forms in schools, the approaches to teaching follow logically from teachers' conceptions of teaching. As the contextual influences grow, they start to influence the ways in which teachers teach. Very strong contextual influences, ..., can lead to a complete divorce between conceptions and approaches. (p. 712)

Similarly, in his review, Fang (1996), who confirmed that teachers' beliefs can impact on their practice, suggests that "contextual factors can [also] have powerful influence on teachers' beliefs and, in effect, affect their classroom practice" (p. 53).

To exemplify, in Puk & Haines (1999), although inquiry had been emphasised during student teachers' pre-service coursework in an Ontario faculty of education, only 28% out of 127 implemented it in their practicum as a learning strategy in subjects such as sciences, English, arts, among others between grades 4 and 12. The reluctance of these beginning teachers to use inquiry was attributed to the following reasons: 1) associate teachers' not using inquiry themselves, 2) lack of encouragement from associate teachers when beginning teacher used inquiry, 3) not receiving any assistance when using inquiry, 4) not hearing discussions about inquiry in the school context, and 5) little familiarity of associate teachers with inquiry. Thus, probably to get a good evaluation and to conform to associate teachers' practice, the majority of beginning teachers taught in a way that did not reflect their beliefs but those of the school culture. However, in Connelly et al., (1997), the

participant teacher's teaching practice reflected her conceptions of teaching but not the curriculum guidelines. As a teacher and teacher educator at the Faculty of Music in a teacher's college in Shanghai, she was able to modify the policy guidelines and direct her course in the most interesting way for her students because her working environment was flexible enough to allow her the freedom to do so. Another example could be found in Westbrook et al.'s (2009) study. The female participant was more able than the male participant to implement student-centred practices taught in their B.Ed programme as she experienced more support from her head teacher. Thus, the head teacher's support or encouragement was necessary for the participants to make a "successful transition" from student teachers to classroom teachers (p. 443).

Watzke's (2007) longitudinal research on the pedagogical knowledge and practices of 9 high school FL teachers in the US can present another example of the effect of school context on teachers' practice. Trying to come up with a developmental theory of beginning foreign language teacher practices and employing techniques of grounded theory analysis, Watzke identified four core categories, "prior knowledge that frames instructional decisions; attitudes toward teacher control in the classroom; instructional goals for daily lessons; [and] consideration for responding to student affect", to explain changes in beginning FL teacher pedagogical content knowledge. Despite their pre-service training, beginning FL teacher may use traditional, outdated instructional practices in their classroom in order to ensure control over students. This may lead student learning goals to be "focused on knowledge about language and instruction based in rote memorization, grammar and vocabulary" (p. 75). When those teachers engage in "teaching, conflict, reflection, and resolution specific to the in- service classroom context" (p. 63), beginning FL teachers' pedagogical content knowledge develops.

Alger (2009) found that several factors in the school hinder teachers from implementing their desired conceptions of teaching in their practice. The participants (110 from both genders and different origin in the US) named students, curriculum, home and community, lack of resources, and administration as "obstacles to achieving desired teaching metaphor" (p. 749). Alger also found that teachers' conceptions of teaching do change, and the major

force behind this change is the teacher's "direct experience in the classroom, particularly as it relates to new understandings about students" (p. 748). This supports the 'symbiotic' relationship between conceptions and practice discussed by Borg (2003).

In four Lebanese High Schools (private and public), Houssari (2008) investigated the implementation of the cultural component⁷ of the National Curriculum in the EFL grade 10 classes. Considering the views of all the people participating in the teaching/learning process, namely head teachers, coordinators, teachers and students, the researcher found that each group of the participants holds a different interpretation of the reform (cultural awareness) and the implementation of the policy came with different results in the language classrooms. Houssari explained that while the "policy guidelines describe cultural awareness through curricular and instructional objectives, THEMES [textbook series] hardly describes cultural awareness as an education/language aim of the new language curriculum" (p. 203), and teachers were trying to follow the textbooks more than the policy guidelines. The different participants attributed the problems in implementation to different factors. For example, coordinators referred to the "difficulty of finding appropriate pedagogies for classroom application, as well as the need for a continuing teacher programme in the area of teaching cultural awareness" (p. 204). For teachers, the main problems lay in the lack of time and "models for teaching cultural awareness and most importantly the way they were absented from contributing to the new curriculum" (p. 204). That is, the teachers did not regard their role as a "central player ... of social transformation ... [but] as technicians, passing a body of knowledge", (p. 205) which led to a gap between practice and policy. To put it in Shulman's (1986) terms, the teachers were given *what to teach*, but not *how* and *why* to teach. To the students, the problem has to do with lack of resources that facilitate their research. As to the head teachers, they were concerned with "the novelty of the concept ... and the need for an external education authority to study the cultural content of THEMES" (p. 205). The importance of this study

⁷ Cultural component or awareness is not stated as an explicit objective in the national educational reform but was embedded in foreign language learning. Two major objectives referred to culture. These are "Masters at least one foreign language as an effective interaction with the international cultures to enrich these cultures and be enriched by them" (NCERD, 1994, P.12) and "Emphasising foreign languages which are a means of openness to various civilisations, cultures, and sciences, and a means of strengthening economic interdependence as well" (p. 13).

to my research lies in it being done in almost the same context and in investigating EFL teachers' implementation of one component of the revised curriculum, namely cultural awareness. Despite the differences in terms of grade level, type of schools, and the focus of the study and despite the limitations on the generalisability of the results, they could be very enlightening to my research as they provide insights about school situations, disintegration between policy guidelines (reforms) and schools, teachers' familiarity with the reforms and their views of their roles in this process.

The research reviewed here suggests then several reasons why teachers' conceptions may be incongruent with their practice: (1) teachers' inability to perceive a new technique as valuable to students' learning, (2) teachers' lack of understanding of the new technique, (3) their negative attitude towards the technique, (4) teachers' poor initial training, which lacked models to follow, (5) lack of appropriate resources and facilities in their classrooms, and (6) strong contextual influences (school policies, external examination syllabi, lack of encouragement among others).

1.7.3 Summing up

In summary, teachers' conceptions are likely to influence teachers' practices; however, they do not always reflect teachers' beliefs. In Argyris and Schön's (1974) terms espoused theory was discordant with theory in use. Borg (2003) asserts this relationship between teachers' conceptions of teaching and classroom practice by stating that although teachers' conceptions "emerge consistently as a powerful influence on their practices, ..., these [practices] do not ultimately always reflect teachers' stated beliefs, personal theories, and pedagogical principles" (p.91). When such practices are not in harmony with teachers' conceptions, teachers are likely to suffer tensions caused by the incongruities between these components. Thus, if EFL Lebanese teachers in Public High Schools are not convinced of the curricular reforms, do not fully understand what these reforms are about or do not perceive the value of the new instructional practice (CL) and do not view themselves as efficient in implementing the new practice, then they are likely not to use that practice in their classrooms even if they are trained to do so.

1.8 Conclusion

These aforementioned studies reveal that teachers' conceptions of teaching, which are complex, co-constructed, evolving and changing, are likely to be the product of prior learning experience, prior teaching experience, teacher education, curriculum, and school context and culture. Teachers' prior knowledge can act as a framework against which teachers evaluate their practices as well as others'. Sometimes this knowledge can be so influential that it interferes with their education (pre-service training). Teacher education can exert a great influence on teachers' conceptions when attention is given to teachers' prior knowledge and attitudes as they are pivotal to the successful implementation of new approaches in the classroom. To facilitate application of the new method, teacher educators- as Britten (1988) suggests- have to deal with teachers' attitudes towards any new method. Karavas-Doukas (1996, p. 188) asserts that "attitude change is an essential part of any pedagogical innovation". Thus, teachers will need to have a positive attitude toward the new practice and be convinced of its relevance to implement it in their classes. Besides, teachers' conceptions of teaching are likely to guide their classroom practice as long as the school contextual/cultural influence is minimal. Then, it was interesting to investigate Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching and find whether these teachers' conceptions were in congruence with the principles of the curricular reforms and hence were reflected in the teachers' classroom practice or whether their conceptions were incompatible with the principles of these reforms and were consequently not translated into their classroom practice.

Chapter Two: Methodology and Methods

As a researcher, the methodological stance that best fits my research is that of a social constructivist, which is in line with my theoretical framework (socio-constructivism). Ontologically, I do not believe in the existence of an objective reality, but rather of a reality that is constructed as a social interaction between me (the researcher), the participants, and the environment. Thus, my epistemological beliefs are that knowledge is co-constructed with other participants in a social milieu rather than transmitted or imprinted on individuals. In other words, my intent as a social constructivist is to interpret the participants' meanings, conceptions, attitudes, and behaviour to arrive at an understanding of their world. That is why I used a qualitative approach and employed interpretive methods that helped me gain deeper insights into Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching and their influence on these teachers' classroom practice.



Figure 2.1 A Framework for Design- The Interconnection of Worldviews, Strategies of Inquiry, and Research Methods (Adapted from Creswell, 2009, p. 5)

The case study, which according to Yin (2009, p. 18) “is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context” and which provides “concrete context-dependent knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 223), was my strategy of inquiry. According to Stake (2005, p. 444), “a case study is both a process of inquiry about the case and the product of that inquiry”. Of the three types of case study identified by Stake (2005), I used the instrumental case study design. Unlike intrinsic case study, “the case is of secondary interest, it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else” (Stake, 2005, p. 445). By using instrumental case study (Lebanese EFL teachers in LPHS), I examined in depth six Lebanese EFL teachers to learn about their conceptions of teaching and the influence of these conceptions on their practice.

2.1 Reflection on Conceptualising the Case

Aware of the impact of cultural traditions on teachers’ conceptions of teaching (Eliam, 2003), I had intended to employ multiple or collective case study as my strategy of inquiry to show as Creswell (2007, p.74) argues “different perspectives on the issue.” More specifically, I had intended to select my participants from different communities (Shiite, Sunni, and Christian) in Sidon and its suburbs to represent the multi-sects that compose the Lebanese society so that understanding of these teachers’ conceptions could enhance our understanding of the influence of the community on the teachers’ conceptions. However, this was impossible for me to do since LPHS in Christian communities were still teaching French as the first foreign language, reminding me of the past during the French Mandate and the feeling the Lebanese Christians used to have toward the French and their language (further discussed in chapter 3). Therefore, I selected my participants from the remaining LPHS in Sidon and its suburbs (which were four) mainly in Muslim communities (Shiite and Sunni) to learn, among other phenomena, about the influence of the professional context and school culture on teachers’ conceptions of teaching and consequently their effect on teachers’ practice. In addition, the influence of cultural traditions, as well as prior learning experiences, could be detected in the teachers’ conceptions of their role and their practice.

As I was collecting and analysing my data, I noticed that the similarities among my participants were more significant than the differences, and the influence of cultural

traditions (Sunni and Shiite) which are both Muslim communities did not contribute to any important differences among my participants. These similarities in my data have altered my conceptualisation of the case study. Instead of analysing my data and presenting my findings in terms of separate cases, I had to analyse them as a whole set of data and employ thematic analysis, which refers to the “extraction of key themes in one’s data” (Bryman, 2008, p. 700). Guided by the data themselves, I was able to extract key themes in my data and identify recurring categories and sub-categories. Moreover, the flexibility inherent in thematic analysis allowed the emergence of new themes other than those related to my research questions (further discussed on p. 57). Thus, it was logical to present my findings in terms of the categories and sub-categories that were derived from the data themselves. To maintain harmony between my methodology and findings, I had to change my strategy of inquiry to instrumental case study, representing Lebanese EFL teachers in LPHS. However, I tried to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the findings. In other words, I made sure that the findings were credible as well as dependable by comparing the data derived from different sources (interviews, observation, and researcher diary), having the participants’ validation of the transcripts, deriving all the themes and categories from the data themselves, and being reflexive throughout the research process. Further information on the strengths of the findings is provided later (on page 53).

2.2 Sample

Because most research in Lebanon is done in Beirut, the capital, and much attention from officials is given to schools in this area, I decided to choose my sample from public high schools in the south of Lebanon, specifically from Sidon and its suburbs. Since Sidon, located 38 Km south to Beirut, is my hometown, this helped me in gaining access to my participants, which was another reason for choosing this city for my research. Since my intent was a reality about EFL teachers and their practice which could be constructed as a social interaction between me (the researcher), the teacher(s), and the learning environment and since I was interested in a rich descriptive picture and not after generalisation, limiting the sample to six teachers in these schools should not affect my results. Most of the FLL in LPHS (5-6 hours/week) happens between grades 7 and 10 when students are between 12 and 15 years old; however, I focused my research on levels 7 and 8 as students in grade 9

have to sit for the National Official Exams at the end of the school year, and consequently teachers in this level might be preoccupied to teach for these exams.

To gain access into LPHS, I had to seek permission from the Ministry of Education in Lebanon. Such permission was secured by writing a request letter to the Ministry explaining the research in details (title, purpose, respondents, methodology, and expected duration) and supporting the letter with an attestation of status from the University of Sussex. After getting the permission, I selected my participants from the four schools in Sidon and its suburbs that teach English as a first foreign language.

I employed purposive sampling in my selection of my participants; I selected them of some typicality: in terms of nationality (Lebanese), grade level taught (grades 7, 8, or both), teacher education programme taken, employment (full-time), subject taught (EFL), but “leaning toward those that seem to offer an *opportunity to learn*” (Stake, 2005, p. 451). For example, the participants had different teaching experiences, different status (one was still a trainee and another was a trainer at NCERD), gender, and attitudes towards the profession. However, working with respondents who were willing to participate in this research became of primary importance as it was likely to maximise the opportunity to learn.

Selecting respondents was not an easy task. However, my selection process was facilitated as I come from the same community of these teachers and share with them the same profession. After securing access into LPHS from the Ministry of Education in Lebanon, I arranged with the school head teachers to meet with the EFL grade 7 and 8 teachers in LPHS located in the selected context. Then I briefed them on my research: aim, rationale, significance, and procedures which included observations (5-6) during regular school days, interviews, and a researcher diary. I ensured them that the purpose behind my research was not to evaluate their performance; rather, it was to investigate into the problem in question, which was about students’ low proficiency in the foreign language. I assured them that their participation was voluntary in nature and that they had the right to withdraw at any time during the research process. I also promised them confidentiality,

anonymity, and non-traceability. I gave a copy of the Information and Consent Form for each teacher to read and sign it in case of approval (see appendix B). To provide some incentives for them to participate, I informed them that this research might be a chance for them to express their opinions and attitudes towards the curricular reforms. I also expressed my willingness to share with them my research should it be of any help to them. Finally, I thanked them for their time.

2.1.1 Description of the Participants

Pseudonyms were used to refer to the participants in this research. All of my participants were Lebanese EFL teachers in LPHS in Sidon and its suburbs. They all came from the same Muslim community. All were females except for one male. This reflects to some extent the overall situation where the majority of EFL teachers in Lebanon are females. Their age ranged between 26 and 35 years with teaching experience that ranged between three and fifteen years. Only three of them were married and had children. All of them had a bachelor degree in English Literature at the Lebanese University, Faculty of Arts, and three of them pursued their education to a Master's degree. Three of them, namely those identified in the research as Lana, Rola, and Fatima, who had received a post-secondary teaching diploma (TD) at the Teacher Preparation College (Dar Al-Moalemeen)⁸ started their careers as elementary teachers and pursued their Bachelor degrees while teaching. All had received their pre-service training, Kafaa Programme except for May, who was still on the programme and whose status was an EFL teacher trainee. As to their in-service training, it was absent for half of them, and only Rola participated in two- fifteen to twenty day workshops on the implementation of the revised curriculum. The others had taken part only in a one-day workshop. Rami, Lana, Sally, and Rola had another job besides their teaching load in their schools. Rami had a store to run, Lana was teaching at a private university and a cycle II trainer at NCERD, Sally was also teaching at a private university, and Rola was teaching at a vocational school. Table 2.1 below summarises these details about the participants.

⁸ Teacher Preparation College (Dar Al-Moalemeen): now Teacher Training Centre. It used to provide teacher training for Lebanese Public Primary Schools.

Table 2.1 Description of the Participants

| Names | Gender | Age | Years of Experience | Marital Status | Degrees | Pre-service training | In-service | Other Jobs |
|--------------|---------------|------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------|-----------------------------|--|-------------------|
| Fatima | F | 29 | 8 | M | MA/EL | TD + Kafaa | One-day workshop | No |
| Rami | M | 35 | 12 | B | BA | Kafaa | None | Yes |
| May | F | 27 | 3 | M | BA | Kafaa (in progress) | None | No |
| Rola | F | 37 | 15 | M | BA | TD+ Kafaa | 2 (15-20 day) training One-day workshop | Yes |
| Lana | F | 29 | 8 | S | MA | TD + Kafaa | None/ training in Cycle I & II | Yes |
| Sally | F | 26 | 5 | S | MA (in progress) | Kafaa | None | Yes |

2.2 Data Collection and Research Methods

According to Yin (2009, p. 114), one major principle in case-study data collection is to “use multiple sources of evidence” either to triangulate data and to develop “converging lines of inquiry” (p. 115) or to analyse “each source of evidence separately” and compare “the conclusions from the different analyses- but not [triangulate] the data” (p. 116). As a social constructivist, I followed the latter option. I employed a variety of data collection methods, namely interviews with different respondents (officials and teacher participants), observations, and a researcher diary. According to Patton (2002), these methods are likely to complement each other, and what cannot be directly observed, such as feelings, thoughts, and attitudes, can be collected through the interviews which Yin (2009, p. 106) describes as “one of the most important sources of case study information”. To facilitate comparison among the participants, I employed the same methods of data collection within each participant, that is, I used semi-structured interviews, sequential interviews, observations, and a researcher diary with each participant teacher. Then to open up different, non-convergent lines of inquiry, I analysed the findings of these methods separately and compared the conclusions derived from these analyses.

2.2.1 *Semi-structured Interview*

To avoid limiting the depth and breadth of the respondents' story, I used the semi-structured interview. According to Patton (2002, p. 341), the major purpose of the interview is to allow the researcher "to enter into the other person's perspective." Dornyei (2007, p. 143) also defines the interview as "a natural and socially acceptable way of collecting information ... which can be used in a variety of situations ... to yield in-depth data". Another important quality of the interview that many researchers such as Patton (2002), Dornyei (2007), Bryman (2008), Creswell (2009), and Yin (2009) emphasise is the flexibility of the interview process as the researcher can use probes "to deepen the response to a question, increase the richness and depth of responses, and give cues to the interviewee about the level of response that is desired" (Patton, 2002, p. 372). Thus, the rationale for using individual interviews with the participants was to explore in depth their conceptions of teaching: how they had developed such conceptions and how these conceptions influenced their practice.

Since I have a good overview of the phenomenon in question (teachers' conceptions and their practice), I was able to develop broad questions about the topic while following the criteria Patton (2002) and Dornyei (2007) identify for good interview questions (for interview guide see Appendix A). The first criterion I followed was the use of open-ended questions such as *How do you view your role as a teacher* because my aim, like any other qualitative inquiry is "to minimize the impositions of predetermined responses when gathering data" (Patton, 2002, p. p.353). Another criterion was avoiding leading questions. I also piloted my questions with two of my colleagues, whose answers revealed the adequacy, clarity, and reliability of the questions. I followed the interview guide during each semi-structured interview which lasted about 60-75 minutes with each teacher participant. As research is an iterative process, I realised after transcribing my first interviews that I needed to interview the participants again to probe further about their conceptions as they did not talk about their CL training. I expected that the questions about their teacher preparation or in-service training could yield data about the participants' CL training. However, they did not. This necessitated asking them more directly about their training in another interview.

These interviews took place at the beginning of the data-collection process in the schools during the participants' free time as the participants preferred. These interviews were taped except for those with Rola, who expressed her preference not to be taped as she did not feel comfortable with it. Although I asked my questions in English, a few of them replied in Arabic and some code switched. In both cases, I validated my translations and transcriptions with the participants.

2.2.2 Observation

Observation, which is used extensively in a case study, was my second important instrument. Because observation is “invaluable for providing descriptive contextual information about the setting of the targeted phenomenon” (Dornyei, 2007, 185), I planned to observe EFL classes as well as in-service teachers' training sessions. I observed each participant 6 times in his/her EFL class during regular school days. These observational data allowed me as a researcher “to see directly what people do without having to rely [solely] on what they say they do” (Dornyei, 2007, p. 185). Through classroom observation, I had the opportunity to learn about invaluable data related to the participants, their practice, and the physical as well as the affective learning environment. During such observations, I assumed the role of a non-participant observer sitting in the back of the classroom where I could be least noticed and influential. Some of the things that I attended to, but not limited to, were the implementation of CL, the use of L1 and L2, teacher's and students' talk, individual and cooperative tasks, the student-teacher relationship, the way that authority was assumed and shared, the roles of students and teachers, and the physical environment. Although my observations were semi-structured, I was open to other areas that could contribute to my understanding such as the participant's preparation, competency, and use of time among others. To get “a rich, deeper, more narrative understanding” of teachers' practice, I did not intend to restrict my observation to teachers' classrooms (Connelly et al., 1997, p. 673) but to observe training sessions that the participants might undergo. By observing teacher training sessions, I could have got data about the type of training, the extent to which it addressed teachers' needs, teachers' attitudes toward the new ideas and the trainers themselves. However, this was not realised as none of the participants took part in any training when I was collecting the data. As to

videotaping these observations, it would have been ideal to be able to do so, but the participants' did not approve of videotaping their classroom sessions. Thus, I had to rely on taking notes, which I typed up and organised while the information was still fresh in my mind.

2.2.3 Sequential Interviews

After each observed session, participants were interviewed about their practice and their conceptions during that session. These interviews ranged between 10 to 20 minutes depending on the participants' free time and the activity during the observed session. Thus, a series of sequential semi-structured interviews with each participant teacher was another source of data. Through such interviews, I gained greater understanding of teachers' conceptions of teaching and the way such conceptions influenced their classroom practice.

2.2.4 Document Analysis

To get information about the civil-service test that LPHS teachers take as a part of their selection criteria, I analysed some samples of previous tests and other written documents related to the test which I got from the Civil Service Council besides a personal conversation with an official there. I also analysed learning activities in THEMES⁹, grade 7 required textbook, and presented samples of these activities in the context section to give concrete examples of the required curricular reforms. Finally, some of the monthly English exams given to students in grades 7 and 8 were analysed to get an idea about the methods of assessment the participants use to assess their students' learning of the FL.

2.2.5 Researcher Diary

In my diary, I recorded activities, feelings, attitudes, and reflections throughout the research process. Although I asked the teacher participants if possible to keep a diary where they recorded their reflections on their practice, feelings, attitudes towards exceptional activities such as an unusually motivated class, all of them expressed their inability to do so as they lacked the time for such a request.

Interviews, observations, document analysis, and diary entries, all fed into each other and enabled me to construct with the participants a detailed and rich picture. These data were

⁹ Written in the same way (in capitals) as it appears on the textbook

collected over a relatively short period of time, six weeks when I was dedicating all my time for this process as I was on a leave from my teaching post. For example, in one day I had three observation sessions and three interviews in two schools. I had to do it very fast as the school academic year was ending. That period was very hectic and draining to me as I always tried to transcribe the interviews and type them, organise my observation data as well as type them, and write my comments and thoughts of what I experienced during the day in my diary day by day. This helped me in recording my data while they were fresh in my memory, so I was able to picture the participants' body language while transcribing the interviews, for instance.

2.3 Limitations & Strengths

I could think of two main limitations. The first is related to the short period I spent collecting my data, and the second is related to the possibility of my impacting on the data during the interviews and observation.

Although I had intended to collect my data over a longer period of time, the time it took me to get authorisation to start my data-collection process left me with almost six weeks before the end of the school year. Even though I felt that some of my observation notes became repetitive and redundant as each participant used to follow the same routine and do almost the same activities in his/her class, had I spread my observations through a longer period of time, I might have come up with more insights and incidents that could probably have deepened my understanding of the participants' conceptions and practice. Spending prolonged time in the field helps the researcher develop "an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study" (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). Dornyei (2007, p. 152) also argues "because of the detailed information we wish to gather about the case, researchers usually spend an extended period of time examining the case in its natural surroundings". However, this was not possible for several reasons. First, because the political situation in Lebanon is usually unpredictable, prolonging the duration is likely to be risky. Second, extending the project over another year adds more demands and commitment on the participants, who might not be teaching the same grade level or in the same school the following year. Third, the permission secured from the Ministry of Education was for one

academic year (2010-2011), and it might have been impossible to extend it over another year.

Second, although as a social constructivist my influencing the participants is inevitable, some of my questions during the second and third interview were so direct that the participants probably gave answers they thought they were the right ones or what I wanted to hear. For example, after my first interview with the participants, I found out that none of them, except for Rola, discussed CL in their practice or their training although I asked them about their views and attitudes towards their pre- and in-service education. At first, I felt odd, and I doubted my understanding of the reform, which I confirmed by going back to the NCERD as well as the curriculum coordinator's description of the reforms. This missing information, which is central to the study, necessitated my interviewing the participants again and explicitly asking them about CL (benefits, challenges, training). Their answers, which reflected that CL was not emphasised in their training but was introduced as a technique among other teaching methods in the methodology course in the Kafaa Programme, justified their not discussing it in the first interview as they were not made aware of its centrality to the curricular reforms.

Another influence could be related to my presence as an observer. Because "people may behave quite differently when they know they are being observed versus how they behave naturally when they do not think they are being observed" (Patton, 2002, p. 269), the participants could have adjusted "what they say and do in line with their perceptions ... of those [research] aims" in order "to create a good impression" (Webb et al., 1966, in Bryman, 2008, p. 266). In some instances, I noticed that some participants had changed their daily plan because I was attending their class. Instead of correcting the homework, one participant did a group activity, and another spent the whole session reviewing the main ideas they had discussed in a previous session in the form of a question-answer technique. Thus, these participants were trying to project a good image of them in front of me. They probably wanted to impress me (as an EFL teacher) and to provide me (as a researcher) with data that feed into my research.

Despite these limitations, the findings of this research satisfy the social construction and constructivist criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1986, in Patton, 2002, p. 546; Bryman, 2008, p. 377) which are trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness is divided into “credibility ..., transferability ..., dependability ..., and confirmability ...”, and authenticity is “reflexive consciousness about one’s own perspective, appreciation for the perspectives of others, and fairness in depicting constructions in the values that undergrid them” (Patton, 2002, p. 546). By comparing the interviews, observation notes and my notes as well as having the participants validate the transcripts, I ensured credibility of the findings. As a case study research, the focus is on depth rather than breadth; thus, the rich and thick description of the participants should provide enough information for others to make judgments about the “possible transferability of [these] findings to other milieux” (Bryman, 2008, p. 378). As to dependability, equivalent to reliability, I tried to ensure that my transcripts were free from errors or misunderstandings by re-listening to the interviews after transcribing them and having the participants’ validation. Besides, during my data analysis, I made sure that my categories and sub-categories were derived from the data themselves. Being reflexive helped to a certain extent to avoid having my personal values or biases “sway the conduct of my research” and the findings (Bryman, 2008, p. 379). In my presentation of the findings, I tried to retain the voices of my participants by presenting substantive quotes said by them.

2.4 Positionality, Reciprocity, Reflexivity and Reflectivity

Merriam et al. (2001, p. 411) assert that one’s “Positionality is ... determined by where one stands in relation to ‘the other’”. My positionality as a researcher in this study was that of an insider as a member of the community, the profession, and LPHS.

Besides the official permission I secured from the Ministry of Education in Lebanon, recruiting my participants was facilitated by my multiple identities as a Sidonian, a LPHS graduate, and an EFL teacher. At the beginning, I had worries about finding participants who were willing to provide me with some of their time and to allow me to observe their classes, but these worries started to diminish after my visit to the first school, where I had completed my secondary education. There, the support and the welcoming feeling I received from the head teacher and my old teachers encouraged the EFL teachers, most of

whom I did not know as they joined the school after I graduated, to meet with me to introduce and explain my research. My professional attire (a suit) made these EFL teachers a little uncomfortable as they thought that I was an inspector sent by NCERD. However, after I handed them the consent form with the University of Sussex Logo, and one of them said “then, you are not sent by NCERD”, they became more relaxed and some of them inquired about my research. To avoid such confusion, I dressed more casually when I visited the other schools where I also met previous school- teacher colleagues, university classmates, relatives or even acquaintances that provided me with a personal access to these schools and helped me to be viewed by the participants as a credible person to work with.

My identity as an EFL teacher played an important role in recruiting the participants too. As I was introducing my research, I was able to identify myself with the EFL teachers, with their problems, which they were suffering from such as marginalising us (EFL teachers) in decision making. While talking to them, I was using the first person plural pronoun ‘we’ to stress my belonging to their group, and I also helped them view this research as one possible way for them to make their voices heard.

I thought that working with a male participant, Rami, coming from a moderately conservative family, would be more difficult as he might not feel as comfortable talking to me as a female researcher. However, my experience with him turned to be the opposite of my worries. Coming from the same community, I was familiar with his traditions and beliefs, to which I showed respect, such as not shaking hands with him and keeping his office door open even when I was interviewing him. He always welcomed my visits to his class except once when he asked me politely to postpone my visit till the following week after observing a rather chaotic session in his class. It might be the effect of my gender that Rami felt the urge to discipline his students before I revisited his class.

Generally, Rami was comfortable enough to work with me as he perceived me as an insider who did not need an explanation for his traditions and beliefs. For example, he felt

at ease to open up and discuss some of his students' personal problems which were affecting their academic achievement.

As to the other participants, it was not difficult to deal with them either. On the contrary, I felt welcomed whenever I visited their classes, and even when I asked them for another interview, all showed willingness to do so. During my visits to their schools, we also used to talk about a lot of things other than the research after their classes, some of which are referred to in the reciprocity section.

Being older, more experienced, and more educated than all the participants, I was expected to give them some advice on personal and professional issues. Although I was happy to offer personal advice as a part of my reciprocity to them, I was also careful not to stray beyond the conduct and focus of my research and affect the validity of the findings by influencing their practice and conceptions.

2.4.1 Reciprocity

According to Patton (2002, p. 415), "Participants in research provide us with something of great value, their stories and their perspective on their world. We show that we value what they give us by offering something in exchange".

Though when recruiting my participants I assumed the role of supplicant¹⁰ as what they were going to offer me was far more valuable than what I could offer them, I felt that I needed to translate my thanks to them for volunteering to help me in my research at the beginning of the data collection process. So I offered them some small impersonal presents such as Parker pens, handbags, and silver accessories and key holders, which they were happy to receive.

However, I was still worried about my inadequate reciprocity to the participants (Oakley, 1981) until I felt that they trusted me enough to seek my advice about some personal problems. For example, I was very happy to recommend a school for Fatima's son as she

¹⁰ Exposing and exploiting weaknesses regarding dependence on whoever is being researched for information and guidance (England, 1994, p. 82)

was not satisfied with his school and to discuss with Rola the problem her little son was facing as a result of their moving out, changing his school, and missing his friends. Sharing Lana and Rami the school celebration on Teacher's Day as well as sipping coffee with Sally and discussing her master's research could not be compared in terms of reciprocity to the small materialistic gifts given at the beginning of the data-collection. Then I felt very satisfied as I had developed some good friendships as a result of this research.

2.4.2 Reflexivity and Reflectivity

Involved in a qualitative, interpretive research, I tried to be reflexive during my data collection and writing-up. Reflexivity involves "self-questioning and self-understanding ... an ongoing examination of *what I know* and *how I know it*" (Patton, 2002, p. 64). It is "self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious *analytical* scrutiny of the self as a researcher" (England, 1994, p.82).

When I was observing the participants' classes, I tried to avoid being judgmental and evaluative. Instead of jumping to conclusions and dismissing something as unimportant or traditional, rather I used to observe, record what was going on in the classroom and then to inquire about the participants' strategies in the sequential interviews. In this way, I would come to deep understanding of what the participants were doing. I cannot deny that as a social constructivist what I presented in this research is my interpretation of my observations and interviews which is shaped by my background as an EFL teacher and a mother to two children in a Lebanese private high school. However, following Patton (2002) and Creswell (2007) among others, I made sure that these interpretations were co-constructed and representatives of the interactive processes between me and the participants. I also made sure to present these interpretations while maintaining the multiple voices found in the context together with my voice.

Being reflexive helped me to reflect on my practice as an EFL teacher. Instead of blaming the participants for sacrificing new teaching techniques to finish the syllabus or teaching for exam, I reflected on what we do in our Intensive English Programme at the university. I found out that because we were following a performance-based approach (Bernstein, 2000) and because teachers were held accountable for the number of students' failures in class,

we were syllabus- and examination-driven to the extent that we were not applying any progressive methods as they are more time-consuming. Although these practices were against our conceptions and beliefs, we had to follow these practices as they were imposed on us by the university's expectations.

In addition, I also reflected on my use of group work in class. I learned that by grouping students of the same ability, I was depriving the students from intellectual scaffolding. Instead of worrying about one student's doing the work, I learned that by encouraging students' interdependence, individual accountability, social skills, and promotive interaction, I could help them learn collaboratively. I began to teach my students how to collaborate and work together to achieve a common goal instead of dividing them in groups assuming that they already know how to construct their own learning without training them on how to do it. In fact, it worked well with my last semester class; weak students achieved better results and were more self-confident toward the end of the semester.

2.5 Data Analysis

Dornyei (2007, p.244) states that “qualitative analysis needs to be flexible, data-led, and ... artful”, and so was my analysis. I analysed my data flexibly enough to allow the emergence of new themes, and I was guided by the data themselves rather than following any “formalized analytical procedures” such as grounded theory that follows “a systematic, step-by-step process” in data analysis (Dornyei, 2007, p.244).

To explain further, I started analysing my data concurrently while collecting the data. I employed “one of the most common approaches to qualitative data analysis” (Bryman, 2008, p. 554), namely thematic analysis. Although thematic analysis does not follow specific procedures, my analysis was guided by the Framework approach identified by Bryman (2008, p. 555) and exemplified by Ryan and Bernard (2003). It provided me with pointers about how to begin and organise my analysis. As I was transcribing my interviews and reading my observation as well as my diary notes, I was able to identify recurring themes/categories emerging out of my data. Although my research questions and literature review acted as my framework of analysis, not all themes were predetermined, but some

were inductively derived from my reading and rereading of the collected data as well as from my constant comparison across the data; that is, I was open to any emergent theme (See appendix C for examples of derived themes from an interview transcription and observation notes). Ryan and Bernard (2003) techniques helped me achieve, as Dornyei (2007, p. 245) calls it, “rigorous flexibility” in my analysis, which is likely to be “conducive to generating new insights ... [and] let new results emerge”. I looked for differences or similarities between the ways that my participants might have discussed a certain topic in relation to my questions. I also examined the use of linguistic connectors such as “because”, “therefore”, “if”, or “instead of” as they point to relationships in the minds of the participants. I gave a special attention to analogies and comparisons that the participants might have used to compare their attitudes, feelings, or thoughts to something concrete such as comparing their role to a gardener or a guide or comparing their teachers to God’s representatives on earth.

Hence, my data analysis can be described as multi-leveled, systematic, and iterative. It began by transcribing the first interview and recording notes of the first observation session, constituting the first level. Transcribing the interviews myself helped me “know... [my] data thoroughly” (Dornyei, 2007, p. 246). Then I read each interview separately as well as the notes of each observation session and identified recurring themes, which constituted my second level of analysis. Not only this, but I went further in analysis by looking at all the interviews of all the participants and all the observation notes in an attempt to find other themes or categories. I compared each participant’s interviews and observation notes looking for commonalities and/or differences between how each participant describes his/her conceptions of teaching and what characterises each participant’s classroom practice. In addition, I applied a “cross-case synthesis” as I was comparing among the six participants in my research looking for “similarities and differences” among them (Creswell, 2007, p. 163). While comparing among the data collected through different sources (the interviews, the observation notes, and my diary), I tried to look for instances of congruities and/ or incongruities between what the participants say and what they do.

My data analysis was iterative too, moving “back and forth between data collection, data-analysis, and data interpretation depending on the emerging results” (Dornyei, 2007, p. 243). Using concurrent data collection and data analysis, I was able to realise that some areas in my research questions such as teachers’ conceptions of CL had not been sufficiently explored in my first interviews. Thus, I conducted two more interviews of about 30-45 minutes each with each participant exploring these areas in more depth.

As I employed semi-structured interviews as well as observations and as I derived my interview questions from the research questions, it was logical that most of the categories and other sub-categories be related to my research questions. These categories were conceptions of teaching and professional context, and these sub-categories were pre-service and in-service training, participants’ learning experiences, their views of their roles etc. However, one category, teachers’ background, and some sub-categories which emerged inductively from my data were use of time, teacher’s competency/proficiency, teacher’s preparation, and classroom management problems.

2.6 Ethical Dimensions

As a research student at the University of Sussex, I had to ensure that my research followed the Sussex School of Education and Social Work Guidelines on Research Ethics. I ensured both a written consent from officials in the Ministry of Education to do my research in Public High Schools and an informed written consent of the participants (1) to participate, and (2) to be taped (see appendix B). Because my research was done in Grades 7 and 8, where students were below 16, I secured a written permission from their parents that allowed me to do my observations in their children’s classrooms. Moreover, I promised the participants confidentiality, anonymity, non-traceability, and I assured to the participants that they could withdraw at any time during the research process and that no deception or harm would be inflicted on them.

Although I had intended to work with 4 or 5 participants as I indicated in my proposal, I selected 6 at the beginning of my research fearing that if any participant decided to withdraw during the research process for any reason, I would still have enough participants for my research. Luckily, none of the participants withdrew or showed reluctance to

participate at any stage of the data collection even when I asked them to sit for other interviews (as explained earlier). Moreover, they were very helpful and supportive in explaining my identity (as a research student) to their students as well as distributing to each student in their classes and collecting back the letters I prepared for students' parents seeking their permission to observe their son/daughter's class. The participants' welcoming feeling that I used to enjoy when observing their classes was also reflected by their students to the extent that some students began to wait for my visits or ask their teachers when I was coming to their class.

I cannot deny the fears I had had before starting my field work about the difficulty of selecting participants who would be willing to give their time and allow me into their classrooms for almost nothing as I was not able to promise them anything then. They did this because they were convinced in the purpose of my research and they wanted to help me. Therefore, I consider myself lucky enough to have worked with these participants with whom I have developed friendships.

Chapter 3: Context

3.1 Status of English

Lebanon is a multilingual country where Arabic, English, French, German, Kurdish, and Armenian could be used in educational institutions, in some basic communicative functions, and/or at home (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999, p. 2). As Lebanon enjoys a special geographical location between the East and the West and as its citizens enjoy the freedom of speech and the freedom of belief (multi-sectarian), Lebanon has been open to multicultural and multilinguistic influences that have affected almost every aspect of Lebanese daily life. One of the affected domains is language education.

Since the middle of the 19th century, Lebanon has known FLL, mainly French and English. Throughout that period, English and French have witnessed alternating ups and downs in the Lebanese society due to changes in politics and the ideological influence of the ruling party. In other words, with Protestant missionaries from the U.S. and Britain settling and founding many Evangelical schools between 1883 and 1916, English was more popular and widespread than French. However, with the French mandating the French language as an official language alongside Arabic and making the knowledge of French a requirement for a civil service job after World War I, French rose while the status of English began to dwindle. According to Shaaban and Ghaith (1999, p.4), “this situation helped make French the language of the educated and the elite”. At that period, there was resentment among Muslims and accusation of the French creating “a Christian political and economic elite well versed in French with no allegiance to Arabic, the native language of the land” (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999, p.4). The dominance of French over English remained even after Lebanon’s gaining independence in 1943 and introducing a foreign language curriculum in 1946 whereby both French and English were rendered required foreign languages. Until the 1960s, when the Lebanese –as other people around the world- realised the importance of English in science, technology, and employment especially in the Gulf area (Shaaban, 2005), English started to regain dominance and popularity. This realisation has led an increasing number of the Lebanese of different religions and sects to choose English as their first foreign language as it is regarded the language of business, science,

technology, and politics. However, their choice is based on practicality rather than ideology.

Despite the high interest in English, the country suffers from “a shortage of [English] teachers and facilities” (Shaaban, 2005, 108). Public schools, which lost people’s trust during the civil war, have started to regain it since the 1990s, when the government followed the strategy of empowering public schools. However, as a Lebanese myself, I can assert that most people still prefer the private sector and those who can afford private schools send their children there. The situation seems not to have changed greatly since Naaoum (1992), citing a study about the situation in public and private schools done in North Lebanon by one of his students at the Lebanese University, found that the majority of the participating public teachers (123 out of 147) would send their children to private not public schools. Some of their reasons were better educational standards, a better social environment, and particularly better FLL. These generalisations hide important differences. According to an official in the Education Division in South Lebanon whom I interviewed, some Public High Schools are better run, and their graduates are good at sciences, yet they remain poor at foreign languages. The difference in performance among public schools was confirmed in Mattar’s recent study (2012). Investigating into the factors affecting the performance of public schools in Lebanon, Matter, who compared two groups of schools (5 high- and 5-low performing intermediate/Middle schools), found that teachers’ motivation is one factor responsible for the different performance in both types of schools besides “school physical working conditions”, students’ quality and socio-economic status, as well as the principals’ leadership style (p. 252).

3.2 Current English Curriculum

The English Curriculum was revised as a part of the Educational Reform Plan in Lebanon that took place post the devastating and destructive Civil War (1975-1990), which paralysed all the domains in Lebanon including education. According to Minister Micheal El-Daher, the general aim of this educational reform is “to develop the capacities of the Lebanese citizen and direct him to serve the nation in the light of an Educational philosophy based on the Lebanese Constitution enacted by the Constitutional Law number (18) issued on 21/9/1990, and based, in, letter and spirit, on the provision of ‘National

Reconciliation Document’ which the Lebanese accepted in conformity with ‘Al Taif Agreement’” (NCERD, 1994, p. 7). El-Daher added that the plan would improve “the effectiveness of the teaching programmes and the compatibility of this effectiveness with the needs of the society and the requirements for its revival and development to establish a better future” (NCERD, 1994, p. 7).

The Reform was sponsored, financed, and coordinated by the Lebanese National Centre for Educational Research and Development (NCERD) of the Ministry of Education, which was called the Ministry of National Education, Youth, and Sport then. A relatively large Lebanese team (102 educators consisting of university professors as well as school coordinators and teachers who were coming from different religious sects) was divided into committees who were given samples of national curricula from the world to guide their work in developing the National Curriculum.

The Educational Reform Plan involves Intellectual and Humanistic, National, Social, and Educational Dimensions. Out of the general multi-educational objectives, the following are the ones that are mainly related to this study: (1) “Emphasising foreign languages which are a means of openness to various civilizations, cultures, and sciences, and a means of strengthening economic interdependence [sic] [interdependence] as well” and (2) “Masters at least one foreign language as an effective interaction with the international cultures to enrich these cultures and be enriched by them” (NCERD, 1994, pp. 12-13).

Thus, the revised national curriculum underscores the need for every Lebanese to be proficient in a foreign language (NCERD, 1994, p.12). Specifically, the revised English Curriculum aims to develop the Lebanese’s English proficiency at three levels: “English for social interaction, English for academic purposes, and English for socio-cultural development” (NCERD, 1997, p. 72). As a result, all students (selecting English as their first foreign language) are exposed to English as early as nursery or grade 1 (Shaaban, 2000, p. 306). Moreover, to help students develop proficiency in the foreign language, the current curriculum allocates the same number of hours for the native language and English in all levels as seen in table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1 Numbers of Teaching Hours Assigned to Languages in the Lebanese Curriculum

| Language | 1 st Language Arabic | 2 nd Language English/French | 3 rd Language French/English | Translation |
|---|------------------------------------|--|--|-------------|
| Cycle I: (Grades 1-3) Primary | 7 | 7 | - | - |
| Cycle II: (Grades 4-6) Primary | 6 | 6 | - | - |
| Cycle III: (Grades 7-9) Middle | 5 | 5 | 2 | - |
| Secondary I | 5 | 5 | 2 | - |
| Secondary II Humanities | 5 | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| Secondary II Sciences | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Secondary III Humanities | 5 | 5 | 2 | 2 |
| Secondary III Social Studies (now called Economics & Sociology) | 3 | 3 | 2 | 2 |
| Secondary III General Sciences | 2 | 2 | 2 | - |
| Secondary III Life Sciences | 2 | 2 | 2 | - |

(Adopted from Shaaban & Ghaith, 1999, p. 9)

The current English Curriculum has a group of objectives summarised as follows:

1. Enabling students to communicate effectively, orally or in writing, in different situations and settings;
2. Enabling students to pursue studies through the medium of English in subject matter areas in general, mathematics and sciences in particular;
3. Developing students' critical thinking skills;
4. Promoting students' positive attitudes toward the target language and culture;
5. Developing students' ability to work amiably with others (NCERD, 1997, p. 148).

Another major change brought by the revised curriculum is in teaching methodology and curricular emphasis, moving from a grammar-based to a more competence-based curriculum.

In summary, the curriculum moves from a system of language education based on rote learning, linguistic correctness, and cramming of information to a system that promotes autonomous learning, thinking skills, and communicative competence. (NCERD, 1997, P. 147)

According to Abboud et al. (1998, p.5), these changes in teaching methodology were based on psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic theories related to children's learning, namely Piaget's (1955) cognitive developmental theory and Vygotsky's (1962) socio-cultural theory, which both constitute the theoretical underpinnings of socio-constructivism. These authors argue, "If this principle [Piaget's (1955) theory of cognitive development] is extended to the EFL context, it means that children in language classes need to be active rather than passive; they need to be engaged in activities of which language is a part; they need to be working on meaningful tasks where the task itself responds to the child's urge to create language to accomplish an end" (Abboud et al, 1998, p.5). Drawing on Vygotsky (1962) who "postulated that children learn from each other in social contexts, especially in mixed ability groups ... [and that] language develops and meaning is constructed as children work together both to be understood and to understand each other" (Abboud et al., 1998, p.5), the authors inferred that "learners need to talk to each other and to have continuous language input" and that this shared learning is likely to create "an atmosphere of involvement and togetherness." As a result, Cooperative Learning (CL) was recommended to be used as a framework for managing classroom interaction as it "provides maximum opportunities for meaningful input and output in a highly interactive and supportive environment" (Ghaith, 2003, p. 451).

Abboud et al. (1998) also encouraged the use of a variety of activities and the inclusion of songs, music, and role play as this is likely to make learning more enjoyable and stimulating, and as it reduces the stress in the learning environment. Besides a stress-free environment, the authors advocated "a sense-rich environment with illustrations and posters on the walls, realia, ..., and direct access to TV, video, and radio ... [as this] will

increase the opportunity for peripheral/incidental learning” (p.6). In short, the curriculum stresses the use of techniques that help develop students’ communicative competence through the use of authentic activities such as storytelling, role-play, songs, games, and dialogues and which is therefore formalised into CL (Shaaban, 2000, p.308).

As to the content, the current ELT curriculum follows a “thematic content-based approach to language teaching ... [since] integrating and organising instruction around meaningful themes would be effective in achieving the communicative, social, and academic goals set for teaching English in the country” (Shaaban & Ghaith, 1997, pp. 200-201). As to the instructional materials, schools may use the textbooks, *THEMES*, prepared by National Centre for Educational Research and Development (NCERD) or any others that go along with the principles, methods, and philosophy of the English curriculum.

To exemplify the learning activities presented in *THEMES, Grade Seven textbook*, I am extracting some of this textbook. The first activity is taken from Unit 2, titled Travel and Tourism. The activity is presented as follows:

In groups of 4 or 5, choose any of the following famous sites in Lebanon:

| | | |
|-----------|-----------|----------|
| 1. Anjar | 3. Sidon | 5. Jeita |
| 2. Byblos | 4. Beirut | |

Prepare a poster with pictures and appropriate information concerning location, directions, history, attractions, etc. (THEMES, 1998, p. 34).

Analysing this activity, we can find that besides the control students have over their learning, this activity can promote a lot of genuine interaction among the group members. They need to negotiate in English about which place to select, divide tasks among each other, research to gather information as well as pictures, write the information together, and prepare the poster together (pasting the information and pictures).

Another example taken from Unit 3 titled Nutrition is as follows:

Interview a partner about his or her eating habits. Write 3 interview questions based on the Food Guide Pyramid and on your knowledge. Then ask these questions and take notes of your partner’s responses. When you are done, exchange roles with your partner. It is now his/her turn to ask and you to answer. (THEMES, 1998, p. 53)

This activity, like the first one, encourages students' interaction through role play. In addition, the success of this activity depends on students' positive interdependence.

A third example is about the use of context clues to arrive at the meaning of words. Such an activity is found in almost all the units. The activity presented below is taken from Unit 1, Animals and Their Habitats.

Guess the meaning of the following words from context. Identify the clues that helped you work out the answers.

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| <i>Rarely (paragraph 1)</i> | <i>hollow dog (paragraph 2)</i> | <i>chase (paragraph 5)</i> |
| <i>Permanent (paragraph 2)</i> | <i>territory (paragraph 4)</i> | |

(THEMES, 1998, p. 14)

To encourage students' use of new learned words in context rather than memorisation, students in the same lesson were asked in another activity to think-pair-share and complete an exercise using these new words.

Do you know what the following words taken from the story you just read mean? "responded, proposed, disturbing, tame, perplexed." Think-pair-share-and complete Exercise 4 in the Workbook to practice them in context. (THEMES, 1998, p. 16)

All the units in the textbook include similar and other activities that encourage students to work together to complete a learning task.

In summary, the revised English curriculum (1) emphasises learner-centred teaching that helps learners become autonomous and responsible for their learning, (2) encourages learners' cooperation to construct their knowledge together and assist each other's learning in a friendly, supportive environment, and (3) focuses on communicative activities that help learners develop their communicative competence and hence be able to communicate in different contexts. In other words, this curriculum resonates with the principles of the theoretical framework guiding this research (socio-constructivism) and encourages the use of learner-centred teaching.

3.3 EFL Teachers in LPHS and their Education

3.3.1 Selection Criteria

Generally, EFL teachers at LPHS are full-timers. However, the Ministry of Education sometimes hires EFL teachers on a yearly contractual basis in case of shortage of full-time

teachers. These contractual teachers are selected on the basis of their degree (a minimum of a Bachelor degree or a Licensure in English language or literature), the years of teaching experience, and the place of residence. Priority is given to those teachers who have the highest degree, longest experience, and closest residence to the school (Personal interview with an official in the Education Division in Sidon).

To be hired as full-timers in LPHS, EFL teachers must satisfy certain criteria: (1) have had the Lebanese nationality for over ten years, (2) hold a Bachelor degree or a Licensure in English language or literature, (3) pass a national written competitive competency test at the Civil Service Council which is only done when there is a demand for teachers in LPHS, and (4) undergo an intensive one-year (of two semesters) preparatory or pre-service training (the Kafaa Programme which consists of 30 credits divided equally over two semesters) at the Lebanese University, Faculty of Education. These steps are chronological, and each EFL teacher in LPHS must satisfy them to be a full-time teacher in these schools (personal interview with an official in the Education Division in Sidon). For example, graduates from the Faculty of Education at the Lebanese University (3-year post secondary schools) cannot go automatically into LPHS unless they pass the test.

Based on a personal conversation with a Department Head in the Civil Service Council and an analysis of some previous exams, the competency test consists of two sections, the first of which assesses the candidates' general knowledge in Arabic (Coefficient 1)¹¹ and the second tests the candidates' competency in English (Coefficient 3). The second section is divided into three sub-sections: (1) questions in English literature such as analysing a poem, which is usually studied by the candidates in their bachelor degree, (2) questions in reading comprehension on a reading text, and (3) a general knowledge question to be developed in an essay. Thus, this exam mostly tests for the candidates' content knowledge of the language. Because this test is not offered regularly, a lot of candidates who aspire to join LPHS might accumulate some years of experience by the time the Civil Service Council administers the test. Those who pass, irrespective of their years of experience, have to undergo the same pre-service training (Kafaa Programme). Thus, it is possible to

¹¹ That is, this test constitutes 33.3% of the candidates' overall grade

find a fresh graduate and another with 6-year teaching experience, for example, in the same course.

3.3.2 Pre-Service Training (Kafaa Programme)

In theory, the pre-service training that EFL teachers in LPHS undergo consists of three parts: (1) coursework (theoretical courses, 25.5 cr.), (2) observation (45 hours, 1.5 cr.), and (3) practicum (90 hours, 3cr.). In the first semester, the trainees are expected to cover almost half of their coursework (13.5 cr.) and their observation. Not until the second semester are the trainees expected to fulfill their practicum. These trainees are paid full salaries by the Faculty of Education at the Lebanese University where the trainees receive their coursework (Personal Interview with the Dean of the Faculty of Education, Lebanese University). Based on this description of the pre-service curriculum, the training is mostly theoretical (25.5 cr. coursework vs. 4.5 cr. observation and practicum combined).

However, what was happening in reality was quite different. During this pre-service training, the trainee teachers were not treated as purely trainees because the trainees were allocated teaching assignments in LPHS (about 12 hours/ week over 30-35 weeks) which is almost *triple in number* the load required in the programme. At the same time, they were expected to cover their coursework and observation. Thus, it cannot be claimed that these teachers were receiving a *pre-service* training as they were teaching before they were prepared for the challenges of the profession. Such an experience could have been very stressful for the trainees as they had a lot of responsibilities in their teaching experience: (1) attending classes and submitting assignments, (2) observing classes and writing observation reports, and (3) preparing and teaching their classes. These responsibilities are not compatible with what is required in their pre-service as described earlier. Most important of all, the trainees are not expected to start teaching until the second semester after they have received more than half of their coursework and have finished their observation hours.

The reason behind such a discrepancy was the demand for EFL teachers in LPHS. Because almost all the trainees had some teaching experience as contractual teachers in the private or public sector, it was assumed that they could handle teaching classes (Personal

conversation with one LPHS head teacher). The head teacher stated that the trainees were exhausted by this arrangement and expressed her preference for these trainees to receive only pre-service training before they carry out any teaching assignment. Through comparing her experience at the Kafaa Programme in earlier times with that of the trainees, she asserted that it had been more beneficial and comfortable as she had not carried any workload then, which allowed her to concentrate on the training.

By placing these trainees in classrooms, one might wonder about these trainees' pedagogy: what images of teaching they had and whether these images were compatible with the reforms. Drawing on what was presented earlier on teachers' conceptions in the literature review section, we can infer that at this stage, before receiving any teacher training, the images the trainees were likely to have were those derived from their learning experiences.

Another issue is if these trainees were given a teaching load because of their experience, in the same token, why were they not exempted from their observations? Despite the importance of observation in the process of training for novice or beginning teachers, most of the trainees were not foreigners to what was happening in the classroom, and the way observation was implemented (simultaneously with teaching and studying) added more pressure on the trainees. Thus, they could have been exempted from observing and writing observation reports to be able to dedicate more time to their teaching, preparation and their coursework, or they could have been asked to observe more experienced teachers teaching the same grade level they were teaching to get insights on how to implement the curriculum rather than observing any teacher in any grade level. It seems that there is no logical justification except acknowledging the bureaucracy that governs the Lebanese system. To illustrate this point about the bureaucracy, getting information about the curriculum of the Kafaa Programme required meeting with the Dean of the Faculty of Education at the Lebanese University, explaining my research, and presenting the permission I got from the Ministry of Education to access LPHS. However, such information in any other private university could be found on their website or in the student handbook. This could be attributed to two factors. First, it seems that the use of technology in the Lebanese University is not as spread as that in other private universities.

The second reason could be related to bureaucracy as I was told in a telephone conversation with an employee at the Faculty of Education that no one could give any information about any programme at the university without the Dean's permission.

Due to the stress the trainees used to undergo, one participant told me that she used to make these observation reports up as she did not have enough time to observe classes. Although this sounded unethical, it was a justifiable act to her due to lack of time. With very minimal follow-up on the trainees (maximum of 2 visits per year for assessment), it was left to the trainees' consciousness, commitment, and ethics to satisfy these requirements. Unfortunately, with the absence of an enforced corporate ethical code, all depends on one's personal ethics.

3.3.3 In-Service Training

In order to provide an on-going professional development for LPHS teachers, the NCERD offers optional in-service training sessions throughout the academic year in the form of one- to two-day workshops. These workshops take place in the Teacher Training Centres (TTC) - formerly Teacher Preparation College¹²- in Lebanon, each of which is located in a province. For example, Lebanese EFL teachers in Sidon and its suburbs can attend training sessions in TTC in Sidon (personal interview with the Director of the centre in Sidon). According to this director, the NCERD publish their training sessions throughout the school year in a booklet which is distributed to all schools in the province at the beginning of the school year. In this way, teachers, head teachers, and/or coordinators can select the sessions that match their needs. If a teacher selects a training session to participate in, the head teacher's approval is a must; otherwise, the teacher cannot attend that training session. The head teacher's approval is usually based on his/her judgment of the benefit of the training for the participating teacher. Unfortunately, as the director stated, sometimes head teachers are reluctant to send their teachers on training sessions as they worry about replacing the participating teachers in their classes. That is why some head teachers wish that no teachers would demand to go on training workshops.

¹² Teacher Preparation College (Dar Al-Moalemeen): now Teacher Training Centre. It used to provide teacher training for Lebanese Public *Primary* Schools. It used to be one-year postsecondary training.

As to the trainers, they are all Lebanese who have a university degree in English and who were interviewed by NCERD. After being selected, the trainers were sent twice on 15-20 day-workshops held in France and England. They also undergo on-going training workshops in Lebanon to be updated. Such workshops are likely to be given by French and British educators (Interview with the Director of TTC in Sidon).

3.3.4 Teacher Status & Cultural Expectation

Teachers in the past used to enjoy a high status in the Lebanese society; they used to be regarded as more knowledgeable people and more well off than other people in the society. However, teachers now do not enjoy the same status as more people are getting educated and earning high degrees. Besides, as people are turning more materialistic, social status is more related to financial status than education, and LPHS teachers are financially dissatisfied.

Although LPHS teachers enjoy a job security as their contracts last until their retirements unlike private schools which adopt yearly contracts, teachers, as other employees in different professions in Lebanon, are not satisfied with their salaries. Thus, the teachers' syndicate, as well as the Labour Union, is demanding a salary increase. In fact, on Thursday, December 15th, 2011 "Ten thousands of teachers went on strike across Lebanon, threatening to escalate tactics if Prime Minister Najib Mikati's Cabinet fails to reconsider a planned wage hike" (Mroue, 2011). Demonstrators chanted, "... the teachers' situation is very bad! Inflation! High cost of living and a slim raise! All this makes us curse this life. ... our salaries have eroded by 80% since 1996" (Mroue, 2011). Because LPHS teachers are allowed by law to teach up to 10 hours above their load (20 hours/week) in another school (private or public) or 5 hours at a university, most teachers are doing so to increase their income (Personal interview with an official in the Education Division in Sidon).

Despite these financial and social changes, respect is still owed to adults including teachers. In other words, students in schools or universities are expected to respect their teachers and not to defy their authority in class.

In addition, schools expect teachers to follow the yearly plan (which consists *only* of a list of the textbook units to be covered during the academic year and which the participants in this study referred to as the syllabus or the curriculum) and to keep discipline in class. Coordinators keep track of what is covered in the plan, evaluate teachers' exams, and check teachers' correction and students' results, but never discuss teaching methodology as every teacher might have his/her own (personal conversation with the coordinator at school C). Keeping discipline in class is expected from every teacher, and the floor superintendents' frequent tours during class sessions are to ensure that discipline and control overwhelm the place.

3.4 Description of the Schools

This section provides a brief description of the four schools where this research was conducted. This information was collected from a personal interview with an official in the Education Division in South Lebanon. These schools are the only schools in Sidon and its suburbs that teach English as a first foreign language. All of these schools have middle and secondary classes. These schools consist of three- to four-storey relatively well-supported buildings with a big playground each. Students in these schools are mostly Lebanese coming from lower working classes or poorer classes (who cannot afford tuition fees in the private sector) and very few non-Lebanese students (Palestinians). However, these schools differ in popularity and reputation which were derived from student results on the two National Exams in grades 9 (end of middle classes) and 12 (end of secondary classes). Letters A, B, C, and D were used to refer to these schools. The two oldest schools are schools A and B.

School A, which is located in the centre of the city surrounded by shops as well as apartment buildings, is a popular school for girls. It has a student body of 769 female students, and only English is taught as a first foreign language in this school. As many as 30-35 students could be found in the classroom. Fatima taught there.

While school B is in the outskirts of the city, it is located in a very crowded neighbourhood (relatively old apartment buildings and small shops). It is co-educational, and both French and English are offered to be taught as the first foreign language in this school. However,

English was more popular as the number of students in the English classes is 395 compared to 81 in the French classes. All in all, the student body in this school is 476, which is almost half the number of the students in school A. This was related, as mentioned earlier, to students' performance on the National Exams as well as to the location of this school, at a distance from the Palestinian Refugee Camp. Classrooms are less crowded in this school; the number ranges between 20 and 28 students in a class. May and Rola taught in this school.

Schools C and D are more recent schools. School C, which is also located in the heart of the city surrounded by a lot of businesses, another Lebanese Public Middle School, and apartment buildings, has the highest student body (950) consisting of both male and female students. Also English and French are offered to be taught as the first foreign language, yet English-educated students were the majority (727) compared to (223) students in the French classes. Because this school is popular, school officials are selective of their students. That is, not all students who apply to this school are accepted. The number of students in one class can reach to 36 students. Sally taught in school C.

School D, which is located in the suburbs up a hill, has the least student body (194). It is co-educational and offers both languages, English and French, as the first foreign language, yet similar to the other schools, the English-educated students (170) outnumber their French counterparts (24). Because of the small student body, the officials in school D are not selective of their students and usually whoever is not admitted into schools A, B, and C can gain acceptance in this school. That is why, Lana and Rami, who taught in this school, considered their work more challenging than others in other schools. In some classes, there are as a few as 12 to 15 students in one class.

Chapter Four: Findings and Discussion

In this section, I am presenting the findings of my research in terms of the derived categories and sub-categories from all the collected data: interviews, observations, sequential interviews, document analysis, and research diary.

4.1 Teacher Background

This category subsumes three sub-categories, namely the participants' attitudes towards the profession, the participants' learning experiences and their pre-service training. These sub-categories are discussed with reference to their impact on the participants' classroom practice.

4.1.1 Teachers' Attitudes towards the profession

Almost all the participants had not considered teaching as their career before joining the profession. All, except for Rola who liked teaching and had wanted to be a teacher since she was in grade 7, had wanted to pursue a different career path, but because of lack of other options, they ended up teaching. For example, Rami wanted to major in engineering and be a computer engineer; however, for financial reasons, he had to abandon this dream and to major in English while working part-time.

First, I was reluctant to go into English, I didn't feel it may suit my personality and ambition to study English literature and then become an English teacher later on, but later I started looking for a career. It was the only available one. (First interview with Rami, 10.3.2011)

Like Rami, the other participants joined the profession either by chance or as their "last resort" (Bennell & Akyeampong, 2007, p. ix). Such an attitude was likely to shape the participants' views and affect their commitment to their career and hence their practice.

Although some of the participants, such as Lana, Sally, and May, enjoyed the profession then and they would not do anything else as they claimed, others, namely Fatima and Rami, were still looking for opportunities to take them outside the profession. For instance, Fatima said in one interview that she wanted a job where she could enjoy the same holidays as teachers' but where she did not have to take her work home as teachers do. She explained what she did not like about teaching in the following excerpt.

All what I don't like about teaching is that I have to take a lot of stuff with me at home; I have to correct papers, prepare, etc. It takes a lot of time doing preparation and correction at home. That's what is tiring about teaching; besides you have other responsibilities at home. You have to do all of this instead of sitting at home and make visits and socialise. (First interview with Fatima, 12.3.2011)

Despite Sally's professed interest in teaching, her attitude towards the profession was altered by her feeling of not being recognised as qualified enough to teach upper grade levels, which frustrated and de-motivated her. This shaped her views of her role as an EFL teacher to the extent that she denied having any role except for carrying out the syllabus (the yearly plan) mechanically and traditionally, that is, as a knowledge transmitter. This is in line with Crookes (1997) who states that when teachers feel that they have no control over what they teach, most of their classes would be text-based. The influence of Lebanese teachers' motivation on their performance was also confirmed in Matter (2012) as discussed earlier.

The impact of teachers' attitudes towards the profession and their commitment has been discussed in the literature. For example, Johnston (1997) found that EFL teachers who do not regard teaching as their career have a day-to-day commitment to teaching rather than a long term view. Draper (2001, p. 300) also finds that if teachers do not find teaching as "stimulating", "motivating", and "offering real opportunities for both professional and personal development", ...then teachers might stay in the profession just because they have no other option, and those teachers might seek any opportunity that take them outside of the classroom. Johnson (2001) maintains that a motivated teacher provides more motivating learning experiences than a de-motivated teacher.

These participants' shaky commitment was reflected in their practice in terms of their preparation to their EFL classes. During my observations, the participants were rarely well prepared for their classes. For example, Rami, who in his first interview criticised the use of traditional dictation activities and preferred more challenging error identification exercises, ended up using such traditional activities claiming that he had not had enough time to prepare more interesting activities. This was probably because he was not dedicating all his time to his teaching career.

I prefer instead of doing that [traditional dictation] is to give them a paragraph with mistakes and ask them to find them...; [however,] I don't have the time to implement this strategy often. If I have the time, I will prepare a paragraph [with spelling mistakes] and ask them to correct it. (First interview with Rami, 10.3.2011)

In addition to teaching, Rami had other jobs too; he was responsible for all IT services in his school, and he had his own electronic store to run. Due to the financial state teachers were suffering from, having multiple jobs was one common solution among them to be able to cover monthly expenses. One salary (about \$ 800) cannot cover all these expenses such as accommodation, food, telephone and mobile bills, power and generator bills. Although Rami was not married, he was responsible for his mother, and he had to secure his future. Thus, he had to take up different jobs to be able to do so.

Inadequate preparation was not only specific to those participants who did not regard teaching EFL as their future career, but it was also common among the others who expressed positive attitudes towards the profession. For instance, Lana, a trainer herself, wished that she could design more interesting and less mechanical activities to use in her class, but she claimed not to have time to prepare for such activities.

I feel pity sometimes because I train teachers to do this but I myself don't do them because of lack of time. . If I am devoting all my time to teaching, I would produce more motivating activities. (Second interview with Lana, 21.3.2011)

Responding to my inquiries about what prevented her from dedicating more time to her teaching, Lana denied that it was for money but for her inability to turn good job offers down such as a part-time position at a private Lebanese university. This left me to wonder whether this justification was enough to make her sacrifice what she knew about good teaching practices and deprive her students in the school of good learning opportunities.

To sum up, the participants' rather negative attitudes towards teaching was reflected on their commitment to the profession by dedicating less time and effort to their classroom performance. Lack of money, recognition, and professional growth influenced the participants' commitment to their daily classes.

4.1.2 Participants' Learning Experiences

According to Lortie (1975), teachers come to teacher education programmes with prior knowledge from their own time as students or an “apprenticeship of observation” and not as a “tabula rasa”. The participants’ prior knowledge included views of teachers as *God’s representatives on Earth (Sally), an authority (Lana), or an ideal (Fatima), a perfect figure who never makes mistakes and whose authority is never questioned (Rami)*. Most participants attributed having such views to the way they were raised: to respect adults and never defy their authority. The participants were likely to hold such views due to the social status teachers used to enjoy in the past (as discussed before).

In addition, they had pictures of some of their English teachers; some of these pictures were negative depicting a harsh, strict teacher, whereas the most memorable ones were positive, remembering a friendly, caring or knowledgeable teacher. For example, Rola described her memorable teacher as

She used to be very calm, tolerant, and her personality motivated us to learn English. Her tolerance she was like a mother to us; she was very friendly, willing to listen to her students’ personal problems. (First interview with Rola, 10.3.2011)

Similarly, Lana stressed the positive interpersonal relationships with her memorable teacher, whom she described as encouraging, stressing individuality and contributing to her confidence.

He used to encourage us. He strengthened my self-confidence, never compared us to each other or to our brothers and sisters. He believed that each person is different and unique. I chose English major because of him. Because of his mentality, I loved the subject. (First interview with Lana, 12.3.2011)

However, none of those memorable teachers was cherished for his/her teaching strategies. The strategies that these teachers used, as stated by the participants, were all traditional.

Maybe the old curriculum makes him [her cherished teacher] more of traditional. (First interview with Fatima, 12.3.2011)

[Her cherished teacher used to have] a traditional way of teaching: she comes, introduces the lesson in a traditional way, reads and explains it. (First interview with May, 10.3.2011)

Because these views and images were not challenged in teachers' pre-service programmes (further discussed below) and because these memorable teachers could have served as the participants' role model (Timmerman, 2009), they impacted on the participants' practice, which was mostly leaning to the teacher-centred pole on the teaching continuum (c.f. Calderhead & Robnson, 1991; Wardord & Reeves, 2003). As the participants regarded friendliness, care, and interpersonal relationships with students a sign of good teaching, they, similar to their friendly memorable teachers, tried to incorporate these qualities into their teaching style, and by doing so they assumed that their pedagogy was student-centred.

May: Usually my classes are student-centred.

Researcher: How can you describe your class today?

May: Of course [it was] student-centred. As you saw, it began by listening to students' stories of how they spent their holiday. I always show interest in listening to every student. (Post observation 1 interview with May, 12.3.2011)

Thus, their conceptions of teaching were so powerfully impacted by the images of their friendly teachers that they equated friendliness to learner centredness.

4.1.3 Participants' Pre-service Training

Concerning their pre-service training, the participants had different views. Those who had a teaching diploma at the Teacher Preparation College (Dar al-Moalemeen)- which used to be the requirement to be hired at Lebanese Public Primary Schools (see p. 68)- namely Fatima, Lana, and Rola, felt that the training they received there was more helpful and beneficial to them than the one they received in the Kafaa Programme (pre-service course). For example, Lana explained their attitude towards the two types of training in the following excerpt.

Then [when joining Teacher Preparation College] we didn't know anything about teaching. There [at Teacher Preparation College] we learned how to write a lesson plan, how to write objectives. However, in Kafaa, 90% of us were teachers with some experience, and there was a focus on methodology. I benefited more from the Teacher Training College. Basically, the same subjects were taught in both, but the level of difficulty was a little higher in Kafaa. (First interview with Lana, 13.3.2011)

In other words, Lana felt the material taught at the Kafaa Programme was redundant and hence not very beneficial because there was, as she hinted, an unnecessary focus on

methodology when most of the candidates in the Programme were relatively experienced teachers. Her attitude was surprising as it suggests mastery or saturation in teaching methodology as if there were only one teaching method. Once it is learned, then the EFL teacher can transmit knowledge to his/her students. Such an attitude reminded me of Freeman & Johnson (1998) who criticise conventional language teacher education programmes especially those which view teaching methodology as a bridge linking the two poles (subject matter and learner) and the teacher as a transmitter of information. Such an attitude could also reflect her view of teacher education as an assimilation of specific knowledge rather than as a life-long process. Her image of her memorable teacher must have filtered what to attend to in her training, which is in line with Akyeampong and Stephens (2002, p.267) who state that

Student teachers who perceive quality more in terms of teacher morals and relationships are unlikely to see teacher training as a means to making fundamental improvements in their capacity to teach, since knowledge of professional practices may be viewed as only a minor component of competence.

Fatima even denied any benefit she could get from the Kafaa programme and described her experience there as “a joke”, indicating that nothing was learned. She complained about some courses as being theoretical and even criticised the trainers there as being very traditional, relying on rote learning and memorisation although they instructed them not to do so in their classes. She added that some of them *were not qualified as they used to make mistakes when speaking in English*. Fatima also complained about these trainers’ doing nothing in class and relying on students to do presentations. Responding to my inquiries about whether that was part of their teaching strategy, Fatima said,

No, not all of them. Some may be doing something while students are presenting. Sometimes they may be sending messages via mobile or talking to someone. No feedback is given. (First interview with Fatima, 12.3.2011)

This situation, as described by the participant, raises a question about the trainers’ attitudes towards the course they were teaching and their trainees. Unfortunately, the behaviours these trainers demonstrated could probably be described as neither responsible nor respectful to the course, trainees, or the whole programme. I could imagine how this situation might have happened while drawing on my experience as a previous part-time

Lebanese University teacher. With the absence of monitoring or follow-up on one's work, a teacher's performance depends on that teacher's conscience, motivation, and commitment to his/her career.

However, two other participants, Sally and Rami, had quite a different opinion. They believed that their pre-service course, Kafaa Programme, was very helpful as they had had no idea about teaching methodology and classroom management before taking it. For example, Sally clarified their attitude by saying:

As English Literature major [graduates], we know nothing about teaching and language. They teach you how to teach. I also took some courses, but I don't apply them [as they are] more theoretical. (First interview with Sally, 14.3.2011)

As to the last participant, May, who was still in the programme then, did not find it that beneficial as she was expected to take up more than she could handle. For example, May was allocated teaching assignments in grades 7 and 8 (12 teaching hours/week) but had to submit to one of her courses at the Kafaa Programme lesson plans on grade 10. The rationale for this was that she was being prepared as a high school teacher (teaching grades 10 to 12). She could not handle all of these responsibilities: preparing and teaching grades 7 and 8 in Sidon, attending classes in Beirut, observing different grade levels and presenting lesson plans on grade 10 besides her other responsibilities towards her husband and three little children. This led her to feel dissatisfied with her performance.

This year, I am not satisfied because I feel I am not doing anything. I am careless. I don't have the time to come up with extra worksheets. I am sticking to the book. I should prepare more handouts [to make students grasp the content], but I am not. I hardly work on lesson plan. I don't have time; I have to go to the college three times a week in the afternoon and sometimes come back at 9:30 p.m. (Second interview with May, 22.3.2011)

This situation must have been very stressful and demanding for May especially in the absence of support and help in school (to be discussed in professional context section). As a student teacher teaching two grade levels, she was deprived of a *pre-service* training where she was supposed to get prepared for the challenges that were likely to face her in the classroom. Rather she was asked to handle multiple stressful responsibilities simultaneously. Unfortunately, all the other participants had suffered from this stressful

situation when they were undertaking their pre-service training. For example, Sally described her experience as *laborious*. Because her experience was *too demanding*, Fatima disclosed to me making up observation reports (writing reports without observing classes) as she did not have enough time to carry out all the required observation sessions, teaching and attending classes besides her family obligations.

May also complained about the attitudes of one trainer towards trainees' mistakes.

One teacher [trainer] is very authoritarian and not understanding. She made fun of some reports the teachers [trainees] produced and she expected better quality reports. Some teachers felt embarrassed and asked the teacher [trainer] not to make fun of them in front of all the student teachers, but the teacher said that secondary teachers should not make such mistakes. (Second interview with May, 22.3.2011)

Despite their different attitudes, all the participants seemed to find the courses that provided them with specific concrete instructions that they need to implement in their classes as beneficial such as how to prepare a lesson plan, how to teach writing, and how to manage one's classroom. In other words, the courses that the participants regarded as related to their immediate needs as EFL teachers and that they believed to help them attain their career goals were rated as helpful. This attitude could best be explained with reference to Dornyei (2001) and Chambers (1999) among others, who emphasise the importance of the value learners attribute to the material being taught. If learners regard the material taught as relevant and worth learning, they are likely to be motivated to learn it. However, if learners "fail to see the relationship between the activity and the world in which they live, then the point of the activity is likely to be lost on them" (Chambers, 1999, pp.37-38). In addition, in his motivational theory, Brophy (2004) argues that one of the conditions for the learners' involvement in an activity is their perception of the activity as relevant to their goals.

Although Sally described her pre-service education as fruitful, she, similar to May, was critical of some trainers' methodology and their attitudes to the trainees' writing mistakes. She criticised the use of lecturing and lack of interaction in one teacher's class and

expressed her surprise towards the attitude of another teacher who used to shout when the trainees had mistakes in their written work.

She didn't have a good way in dealing with the students. She used to shout when you write in the wrong way. So how could we write properly if we were not taught how to write? (First interview with Sally, 14.3.2011)

This quotation shows that some trainers were poor models for the trainees. The trainer lectures and instructs trainees to have a friendly attitude with their students when he/she fails to demonstrate the same attitude towards the trainees and is far from being learner-centred.

Sally even questioned the reliability and validity of the written test taken at the Civil Service Council, the only selection criterion for appointment as a LPHS teacher besides the bachelor degree and the Lebanese nationality.

This test does not evaluate teaching ability; it tests teacher's knowledge of literature and language. This test is mainly based on rote learning and memorisation [she was referring to the questions on English literature]; any teacher who memorises the required material can score very high on the test irrespective of her teaching ability and fluency. Another drawback is that there is no follow up on the teachers who pass the test. Nobody checks how these teachers are doing in schools. (Second interview with Sally, 26.3.2011)

What Sally raised about the fluency problem seems to be true. Based on my observation, most of the participants had proficiency and competency problems. Lexical, grammatical, and phonological inaccuracies were identified in their talk. Some even struggled when constructing questions in English in class to the extent it sounded as if they had been speaking English for the first time, and some more often used the native tongue during their classes. A lot of their students even seemed not to be used to listening and understanding English as they frequently asked their teacher to translate what he/she said into the native tongue. This finding resonates with Shaaban's (2005, p. 108), "The overall level of proficiency in English among language teachers remains far from satisfactory..., but they are nonetheless employed by schools as the demand exceeds the supply".

Sally's criticisms are also compatible with research in the literature. For example, Cullen (1994), who criticised the conventional language teaching preparation programmes in most

parts of the world, expressed his worries about EFL teachers' inadequate command of the language they teach and blamed training programmes for not developing teachers' target language proficiency as much as they develop teachers' knowledge of methodology, pedagogical skills, and linguistic theories about language and language learning. Similarly, Sesek (2007) argued that the conventional programmes in Slovenia focus on developing knowledge *about* the language, and they pay little attention to future EFL teachers' language proficiencies, which is a very important component in EFL teaching. In fact, "Today's EFL teachers are faced with the challenge of achieving appropriate levels of target language proficiency for carrying out their professional activities" (p. 412).

Sally's criticism for the selection criterion corroborates with Schwille et al.'s (2007, p. 35) criticism of teacher education programmes. In addition to describing the current preparation of teachers as insufficient, these researchers complained about the low standards in the selection and exit criteria in teacher education programmes. What Sally discussed about the test shows that educational reforms did not include the teacher education programme curriculum. Yet such a curriculum is expected to prepare student teachers to implement the reforms in the school curricula

Another important point raised by Sally was lack of follow-up, or in other words, the absence of coaching in schools. Several researchers have stressed the important role a coach or a mentor can play in the professional life of a novice teacher. For example, Schwille et al. (2007) criticised the ineffectiveness of *lengthy*, mostly theoretically based preparation of pre-service training and suggested having a more effective, short initial preparation and the saved cost could be used to provide the new teacher with a coach who can direct and support the teacher in his/her actual teaching practice. Hill (2008 cited in Nabhani and Bahous, 2010, p. 212) found that even skillful trainers cannot impact trainees' performance "due to lack of follow-up". Kost (2008) also stressed the role of teaching practice under the supervision of a coach. In fact, the main aim of Kost's apprenticeship model is to improve EFL instruction by "having only experienced and well-trained instructors teach" and providing student teachers with "day-to-day teaching experience in the classroom under the guidance of a more experienced instructor" (p. 31). Similarly,

Harvey (1999), who experimentally studied the impact of coaching on the teaching methods of primary science teachers in South Africa, found that “teachers who received coaching made substantial changes, whereas most teachers who received workshops- only remained similar to the control group” (p. 191). Joyce and Showers (1988, p. 88) found that “Coached teachers generally practice new strategies more frequently and develop greater skill in the actual moves of the teaching strategy than do uncoached teachers who have experienced identical initial training...”.

The need for a coach was felt by May, who was still undergoing her pre-service training and who was still trying to figure out how to implement the curricular reforms and yet maintain discipline in class. Instead of having a coach or a mentor in her class to help her implement what she was learning in the pre-service course, give her constructive feedback on her practice and encourage her to be reflective on her practice too, she was left on her own struggling to survive her early years of teaching.

Another point that merits our attention and was a factor behind the participants’ adoption of more traditional teacher-centred methods in most of their classes although they were instructed not to do so is the trainers’ use of such methods themselves as Fatima and Sally mentioned earlier. The trainer recommended the use of one method, yet he/she practised another in the classroom. If the trainers had believed in what they were lecturing about, they would have demonstrated this in their classrooms so that the trainees could have learned how to implement these taught methods in their EFL classes. In other words, because the trainees did not experience learner-centred teaching in their training and their trainers did not provide any model for them to follow, the trainees could not implement it in their classrooms properly. This point was also discussed in the literature as a factor that impedes teachers’ implementation of learner-centredness. For example, Schweisfurth (2011, p. 428) argues that “teacher education is itself rarely learner-centred, and so does not provide suitable models upon which fledgling teachers can base their practice”.

Other researchers such as Akyeampong et al. (2011), Westbrook et al. (2009), Haser and Star (2009), and Ashref et al. (2005) discuss the inappropriateness of teacher education

programmes that promote learner-centred pedagogy, but they fail to help trainees to translate this pedagogy into their classrooms. Akyeampong et al. (2011, p. 22) found that “there is a discrepancy between what is required of teachers to teach the primary curriculum [in six African countries] and the preparation that they receive to do this from their initial training.” They explained this discrepancy by comparing curriculum development in primary level to that in teacher training which they found to be less frequent and less detailed than the primary school curriculum. According to Westbrook et al. (2009, p. 438), “while teacher-training programmes might emphasise the importance of group work, cooperative learning, whole class and group discussion, and presentations, the trainees are not exposed to such training themselves”, which leaves them unable to realise it in their classrooms. In fact, Davies and Iqbal (1997, p. 261) asserted “If trainees themselves are not used to participative learning, it is hardly surprising that they will go on to teach in schools in very teacher-dominated ways. The very notion of a 'model lesson' is not inspired to encourage experimentation.”

What was surprising to me after my interviews with the participants was that they did not refer to any CL training neither in their pre-service nor in their in-service until I explicitly asked them about it in another interview. Their answers justified their not mentioning CL in their teacher preparation course. They explained that they were introduced theoretically to this technique in the methodology course in the Kafaa Programme, but did not practise implementing it during their training. What Rami said about this issue (receiving training in CL) could best express the situation.

Specifically in CL? No. But we read about it in one of the courses in Kafaa, but no hands-on experience. In methodology course, we studied many of the methods, but not in depth, not even applied it in class or have a simulation during the course. (Third interview with Rami, 20.4.2011)

To sum up, what constitutes the participants’ pre-service training is basically theoretical as the observation and practicum parts were marginalised and not implemented effectively. Despite the importance of theories in teacher education, the trainees were not made aware of these theories’ practical implications in their classrooms. CL, which is to be used in implementing the curricular reforms, was not even emphasised or practised. Thus, these

theories were memorised for the exam but neither experienced nor practiced by the trainees during their pre-service. Although a part of their pre-service was dedicated to practicum, the trainees were expected to fulfill this requirement on their own without sufficient assistance from their trainers and before they received any preparation. Trainers' rare visits (once or twice a year) to the trainees' classes were usually for assessment. Thus, the trainees were left on their own struggling to survive their early teaching experiences. What made their experiences worse was the discrepancy between what they were lectured about and what they experienced themselves in their training as well as the discrepancy between what they had to teach (workload) and what they were supposed to do as a part of their coursework (see p.79). Therefore, with insufficient, theoretical pre-service training and the absence of a real model implementing the new teaching methods, the trainees found it difficult, if not impossible, to implement these methods in their classroom practice, and hence they drew mostly on the traditional methods experienced by them as language learners and teacher trainees.

4.2 Conceptions of Teaching

Under this category, five sub-categories were identified, namely teachers' beliefs about FLL, teachers' views of their role, their conceptions of the curricular reforms, their attitudes towards group work/CL, and teachers' practice. Each of the first four sub-categories was discussed with reference to the last sub-category, teachers' practice. My rationale for doing this was to compare between what the participants said about their attitudes, beliefs, and views and to what extent they translated these into their classroom practice.

4.2.1 Teachers' Beliefs about Foreign Language Learning (FLL)

Based on the interview data, all the participants reported that they believed the best way for students to learn the foreign language (FL) was through the use of progressive methods and learner-centred classes. They all emphasised the importance of students' active role in the learning process. Their reported beliefs were mostly derived from what they memorised during their pre-service training (as discussed earlier) and/ or from their in-service training (in the case of Rola). Table 4.1 below summarises what the participants' answers were on this issue during the interview.

Table 4.1 Participants' Beliefs about FLL

| Participants | Beliefs |
|--------------|--|
| Rami | <i>Students should be experimenting, trying, learning by trial and errors. If they don't speak, they can't learn. Lecturing is inappropriate in schools because students will be receivers only. Helping and assisting students is better than dictating them. Memorisation without understanding is not good.</i> |
| Rola | <i>Teachers should integrate the skills, engage students in real life situations, expose them to native speakers of English, involve them in activities, and encourage students to listen to the foreign language outside the classroom, at home through different media such as TV.</i> |
| Sally | <i>Students learn through cooperative learning, working in groups, also through presentations, doing projects in pairs such as preparing a cardboard, focusing on speaking and away from memorization.</i> |
| Lana | <i>Students learn best in a friendly environment, through the use of self-corrective methods, and the use of humour while keeping discipline. The teacher should be patient and help students develop their confidence in the FL.</i> |
| May | <i>There should be more communication between [the] teacher and students in order for students to learn English best.</i> |
| Fatima | <i>Students learn EFL when engaged in field trips, in creating their projects, and through the use of visuals.</i> |

In other words, their reported beliefs on FLL lie within the constructivists' viewpoints, whereby students should be involved in the process of learning which takes place in a friendly, cooperative, realistic environment. All the participants reported their beliefs in learner-centred approaches to FLL. None of them, except for Sally, mentioned CL specifically as a good practice to FLL. This may be indicative enough of their little understanding of CL as an effective learner-centred pedagogical practice recommended to be used in the Lebanese curricular reforms. In other words, although the participants articulated pedagogical practices which could be said to “fit” within CL, CL per se was most likely to be separate from their conceptions of what makes good practices in FLL.

Despite their reported learner-centred beliefs to FLL, their practice was mostly incongruent with these reported beliefs. In almost all the observed sessions (34 50-minute sessions), their classes were more teacher-centred, conducted in lockstep where the teacher participant was the main actor in the class and the students had mostly a passive, receptive role. To illustrate, Rami, who stated that memorisation and rote learning should be avoided as they were a “painstaking activity”, provided students with a list of 110 English verbs with their conjugation (in the simple past and past participle) and their Arabic

equivalents to memorise at home. Responding to my probes about the incongruity between his beliefs and his practice, Rami explained that teaching grade 7 was different from teaching in the secondary levels.

Students in secondary can be more responsible for their own learning [whereas] in grade 7, you have sometimes to rely on traditional methods of teaching ... because they don't take responsibility for their own learning. (Post observation 3 interview, 5.4.2011)

Such an assumption has weaknesses as it is a matter of training students to assume responsibility rather than a skill that can magically be developed with age. In other words, we help students become responsible for their learning at an early age, and this responsibility becomes bigger as students move from one grade level to another. In addition, what Rami said contradicts with researchers, among whom are Johnson et al. (1995, p.4) who state that CL could be used “at every grade level, in every subject area, and with any task” and Gillies (2007, p. 1), who cited Cohen (1994) in defining CL as a “teaching strategy that promotes socialization and learning among students from kindergarten through college and across different subject areas”.

Another example is Lana, who claimed that her attention was usually given to less achieving students in class, whereas according to observation data, only students who raised their hands were attended to, which resulted sometimes in half of the class passively sitting in class, yawning in the back or daydreaming. When asked about the quiet students in class who seemed not to participate, she said that

One is a hopeless case as he repeated grade 7 three times and was promoted only because his father wanted him to stay in school, and I doubt that he could pass. Plus when half of the class participates and seems to understand the lesson, I assume that objectives are being met. (Post observation 1 interview, 15.3.2011)

This quotation is incongruent with her claimed view of FL learning/teaching as she was not attending to the individual learning needs of her students. Rather, she was subsuming these needs under those of the whole group and was satisfied with their overall achievement. However, according to learner-centred teaching, individual differences are respected, and learners progress in their learning according to their pace. In addition, “evaluative criteria [in learner-centred teaching] focus on the presences [what has been

achieved] rather than absences [what has not been achieved yet] in the learner's competence" (Sriprakash, 2010, p. 298). Thus, teachers following learner-centred teaching should develop an evaluative profile for each learner rather than look at the performance of all the learners in the class.

In summary, the participants' reported beliefs were mostly incongruent with their practice. The participants said they believed in student-centred, constructivist approaches to teaching but drew mostly on traditional, teacher-centred, behaviouristic transmission approaches during their classroom practice. The notion of espoused theory vs. theory in use (Argyris and Schön, 1974) was evident when the participants expressed their beliefs and gave details of good teaching practices around learner-centred teaching, whereas in practice, they were drawing heavily on teacher-centred classes.

4.2.2 Teachers' Views of their Role

All of the participants' views of their role except for Sally fell under learner-centred approach. The participants could have developed such views as a result of what they had been lectured about during their coursework in their pre-service training (as discussed earlier). The participants' conceptions of their role as EFL teachers varied between a facilitator, a guide, a counselor, a gardener, and a transmitter. Table 4.2 below summarises the participants' views of their role.

Table 4.2 Teachers' Views of their Role

| Participants | Views |
|--------------|--|
| Rami | <i>To help students learn; you are not teaching. You are giving them the tools and they are learning. They [students] have to research, work, write their own reports, present in class. So they are more involved in their learning process.</i> |
| Rola | <i>to guide students, to build up their character, to be social members, preparing them for their future besides providing knowledge</i> |
| Lana | <i>a teacher can play many roles a facilitator, a provider of knowledge, [and] a trainer, but I view myself more like a monitor and a guide</i> |
| Fatima | <i>I have a message [a mission]. Students are being entrusted to me and I have to take good care of them as a "gardener" takes care of his/her plants</i> |
| May | <i>a bit of everything ... guide them [students], provide knowledge</i> |
| Sally | <i>Frankly, I feel I have no role ... [I teach] just like a machine. I can't apply new models in teaching deduction, induction, organise groups ... in class ... [as] this may take some more time and you have to stick to the syllabus. I feel it's better to go on and teach mechanically and traditionally to finish the curriculum.</i> |

Rami viewed himself as a facilitator of students' learning, *giving them the tools* that help them learn. Fatima viewed her role as a gardener, taking good care of her students who were *entrusted* to her. Lana viewed herself as a monitor and a guide, and May as well as Rola stressed that their role was mainly to guide their students besides providing them with knowledge. However, Sally, who seemed aware of the superiority of learner-centred teaching but was too de-motivated to assume such a view (see attitudes towards the profession section), felt that she had no role but convey knowledge *according to the syllabus [yearly plan]*.

Unfortunately, their classroom practice was not much consistent with their views according to observation data. The participants seemed to act most often as knowledge transmitters in their EFL classes. For example, Lana, who described her role as a guide, acted most likely as an orchestra conductor; she was in complete control of classroom activities. Almost all her classes that I observed except for one were conducted in lockstep where the students had a very minimal role in class; it was almost restricted to doing what the teacher asked them to do such as solving exercises in their textbooks/ workbooks or answering her questions. Interactions were almost always between the teacher and the

students, never among the students themselves. Besides, students' responses in these interactions consisted of incomplete mostly memorised answers (phrases or chunks) to the teacher's statements or questions. In other words, students were passive in class, were receivers of whatever the teacher provided them, and were not given any authority or responsibility over their own learning. She did almost all the talking, read instructions in the book or workbook, explained what the students should do and summarised main points, not allowing or giving chances for the students to think, negotiate their understanding, or speak complete sentences in English. That is, students were generally deprived of real opportunities to communicate in the foreign language in class. Thus, how can they do this outside class?

Referring to the theoretical framework, what was happening in the classroom above is incompatible with the principles of socio-constructivism. Knowledge was regarded as an objective reality that can be transmitted to learners rather than a process that can be constructed by the learners themselves as a result of their interaction and collaboration to achieve a common learning task. Besides, learners were viewed as objects responding to stimuli rather than active, responsible agents of their learning. Even the quality of interaction between the students and the teachers is not stimulating enough for discovery and exploratory learning. There was no negotiation of meaning. Finally, the teacher's role was central rather than a facilitator in the learning process. The teacher was in complete control over the learning process in terms of what, how, and when to teach.

The mismatch between the participants' *reported* views as well as descriptions of their role and their *realised* role could be related mostly to what was presented in the previous section, that is, their initial teacher education. Although these participants were exposed to progressive teaching methods and lectured about different roles teachers can assume to facilitate students' learning, they experienced neither these teaching methods nor these roles in their training. Thus, being superficially attracted to these roles and methods (as they were lectured about their benefits), the participants reported to have such roles and to use such methods during the interviews. However, not being able to actualise these reported roles in their practice as they did not fully understand them, lacked a model, and

were not fully convinced in the value of the new ideas (see participants' conceptions of CL/group work section), they assumed most often the traditional role of the teacher (knowledge transmitter), which they mostly experienced in their learning process as language learners and teacher trainees. Therefore, their established conceptions of their role, as reflected in their practice, are mostly that of knowledge transmission.

4.2.3 Participants' Attitudes toward the Revised Curriculum (Reforms)

All the participants complained about the curriculum in one way or another. Their complaints were about the textbooks and the long syllabi. All were dissatisfied with the textbooks saying they lacked enough instruction in grammar and writing, extraordinary exercises, phonetics, instructional aids, and interesting topics for the students.

Rola and Sally talked about inadequate grammar and writing instructions. What they were referring to was the absence of explicit instructions on how to write a paragraph or an explicit presentation of grammatical rules. However, this is what the whole reform was about: integration of skills, emphasis on *use and communication* not accuracy, and inductive learning. Such attitudes reflect the participants' lack of deep understanding of the reforms (c.f. Hussari, 2008), their conceptions of teaching (students learn deductively), and their realised role in their classrooms. The participants' inadequate knowledge and rather negative attitudes towards the reforms were most likely influencing their practice. In other words, because the curricular reforms were not internalised into the participants' conceptions of EFL teaching and learning but remained separate from them, the participants did not much incorporate these reforms into their practice and maintained in most of their classes the traditional teacher-centred practices which they were mostly familiar with and which are most likely to represent their conceptions of teaching as EFL teachers. This confirms what Glisan (1996), Freeman and Freeman (1994), Allen (2002), and Connelly et al. (1997) say about the importance of attending to teachers' conceptions of teaching first for the reforms to be realised in the classrooms. That is without "altering the way in which teachers think about teaching", (Glisan, 1996, p. 41) these reforms are likely to stay on paper and never translated into the teachers' classroom practice. Instead of having a constructivist, inductive approach to learning, the participants appear to have a more transmissive, behaviouristic approach, affecting their teaching techniques.

To illustrate, in one session, while Rola was reviewing the reading lesson which was about the Food Guide Pyramid, and where most students were very enthusiastic to participate, their answers reflected their understanding of the content. However, when Rola moved to another related reading passage about Deficiency Diseases, none of the students was able to answer her question about what caused protein deficiency. This was indicative enough of students' lack of understanding of food groups or their inability to discuss them in English; however, they were mostly parroting what they had memorised in the previous session as Rola was used to a lot of drilling exercises in her classroom and, like most of the other participants, used to ask students to memorise answers to comprehension questions on every reading text.

The following is another example depicting the participants' insufficient understanding of the reforms. Believing in deductive learning, Sally, like other teachers in her school, told me that she was using a supplementary textbook¹³ to fill the gap of the required one, THEMES. They assigned this additional textbook *without the knowledge of the inspector or any other authority in the government*.

If an inspector finds out about this textbook, he [/she] will get crazy and write a report about us. This is to help students do the activity in the book and workbook such as writing a paragraph. How can we do such activity without instructions on the use of capitalization, commas, FANBOYS [coordinating conjunctions], supporting sentences, etc? (Post observation 2 interview with Sally, 13.4.2011)

The above example reflects teachers' beliefs of how learning is to take place, i.e. through deductive, explicit presentation of rules rather than through integrating the skills and helping students construct their knowledge about paragraph writing through inferring this from their reading texts which the curriculum and THEMES, the required textbook, asked students to do. Her ambivalent beliefs about FLL were also confirmed in the following instance.

Sally: Students learn the language [English], but they don't speak it [unable to communicate in English].

Researcher: Why do think they are unable to communicate in English?

Sally: because we don't teach oral communication. In the curriculum, we should assign one hour for oral communication. (2nd interview with Sally, 26.3.2011)

¹³ It is a more traditional non-integrated writing textbook.

This shows that Sally believes that oral communication is only learned in a controlled environment where the teacher is explicitly and deductively teaching them what and how to communicate in a certain situation rather than it can be picked up as students are involved in a genuine task that requires them to communicate to accomplish it (as those presented in the context). Thus, how are these participants, whose conceptions of teaching are barely consonant with the principles of the curriculum, expected to carry out the reforms or implement the revised curriculum?

Another important point to be raised is the participants' complaints about lack of sufficient time to fulfill the requirements of the curriculum. Yet the teachers had some time management practices that did not help. For example, around ten minutes was usually wasted before Rami and/or May were able to start implementing their lesson plans for that day due to either lack of preparation or behavioural problems. In addition, sometimes time was wasted as a result of having students copy a whole exercise from their workbook in their copybooks as Sally did. In another occasion, students were made to write their answers to a mechanical exercise on the board. As a result, almost the whole session was spent on this exercise which would have taken only five minutes if it had been done orally.

In short, the participants lacked deep understanding of what the reforms were about. These reforms were mostly in conflict with their established beliefs about FLL, which were reflected in their classroom practice. This situation made it difficult for them to implement these reforms in their classrooms. Thus, unless these beliefs about FLL are challenged in their training and unless the participants develop deep understanding of these reforms and be convinced of their value to students' learning, the participants are unlikely to be able to help their students construct their own learning or transfer their knowledge from one situation to another.

4.2.4 Participants' Conceptions of CL/Group Work

Working with the participants, I noticed that they equate CL to group work and use them interchangeably.

Although all the participants stated that CL could be a very effective and beneficial teaching technique, their attitudes towards its applicability ranged from possible, doubtful to impossible. The participants seemed to be aware of the benefits of CL; some of the benefits which they named were *enhancing social relations among students, motivating students and encouraging them to talk, helping each other to learn, increasing their self-confidence, complementing each other's weaknesses, and feeling less shy ... , less inhibited to inquire, ... more confident to speak English among the group rather than among the whole class*. However, they were also aware of the so many challenges they might face that could make its implementation difficult if not impossible.

I don't know how much it could be applied here. But from time to time we implement it. However, students might not take it seriously, ... it takes too much time in terms of preparation and class time. So by applying CL, I might not be able to finish the curriculum [yearly plan]. (Third interview with Rola, 20.4.2011)

Other participants, namely Lana, Sally, and Rami, stated that class size could be another challenge. Almost all the participants named *students' dependency on others to do the work, noise, and arrangements of seats* as other problems facing them when implementing CL. Sally and Fatima named students' attitudes towards working with others as another challenge.

Hearing what the participants said about the benefits and challenges of CL during the interviews, I got the impression that these participants were well-informed about it, as well as convinced of CL as an effective teaching practice in EFL despite its challenges. However, what I experienced during my observation and what the participants said to me about their training reflected their inadequate knowledge of CL and their negative attitudes towards it.

The participants' doubts about the possibility of implementing CL were most related to their little training and familiarity with this technique. Except for Rola, all the participants denied receiving any training on CL during their career.

Lana, who also asserted that she did not receive training on CL specifically, stated that they sometimes worked in groups during their pre-service training, which could be an

indirect way for them to learn the technique. Equating working in groups to CL reflects Lana's faint idea about CL. According to Gillies & Boyle (2011, p. 64) "placing students in groups and expecting them to work together will not promote cooperative learning". Instead, CL requires "careful planning, monitoring, and evaluating" (Gillies & Boyle, 2011, p. 64). Thus, learning how to implement CL requires more than working in groups. Then the question that rises is: How is Lana, together with the other participants, expected to implement CL in her class if she knows very little about it? This could explain her reliance mostly on lockstep teaching according to observation data.

However, Rola had the chance to participate in two- workshops (15-20 days each) in the summer that preceded the implementation of the curriculum in schools. The purpose of that training, as Rola said, was to introduce the revised curriculum (curricular reforms) to the trainees and help them on how to implement it.

It was about how to implement the curriculum. We were given booklets about CL, different techniques and games to be used in class. During the workshop, we were taught how to divide the groups, [into] heterogeneous [achievers] (low, mid and high achievers). It also focused a lot on student-centred class. A lot of role play took place during the workshop; we used to play the role of students, and the trainer the role of the teacher. (Third interview with Rola, 20.4.2011)

Although she was luckier than the other participants in participating in such training, one might wonder whether that training was sufficient for Rola to help her resolve all the challenges that the participants and other teachers in different research studies identified when implementing CL in their classrooms (Sachs et al., 2003, Gillies & Boyle, 2010, Gillies & Boyle, 2011 among others). Based on my observations, although Rola tried to implement a jigsaw reading activity in her classroom, the experience was not successful for several reasons. First, because it was difficult to rearrange the seats, students were grouped according to their places in the classroom; the closet four students were grouped together. That is, students were not grouped according to their ability in order to provide intellectual scaffolding necessary for their learning. Second, students were not used to working together, which made some of them take advantage of this arrangement to do anything but working on the assignment such as chatting in Arabic. Third, students within their groups were using the native tongue instead of English. Although Rola tried to ensure that everybody was working and speaking English, the result showed that not much was

accomplished. For example, each group's task was to read a paragraph in the reading text and come up with the main idea of that paragraph. Although about thirty minutes had passed, none of the groups succeeded in its task. The whole session was spent on this activity without accomplishing the objective of this task, identifying main ideas in the reading selection. Explaining why this activity failed, Rola stated that students needed time to get used to this strategy. This leaves us wondering why the students are not used to working in groups when the revised English curriculum has called for such methods since 1997. Why did not Rola use this strategy earlier in her classroom?

Rola: getting used to applying CL is difficult at first. [I] don't expect it to be successful from the first time. Sometimes students might not take it seriously, so we have to move around to monitor them. It takes time also from the part of students to get used to this strategy. In lower levels, you need an assistant to help you to implement it. Second, it takes too much time in terms of preparation and class time. So by applying CL, I might not be able to finish the curriculum [yearly plan]. So I can't claim that I am applying 100% what I have been trained to do.

Researcher: Why? What are the reasons?

Rola: No definite reasons. I don't know, probably the students' proficiency, habit, or to check on each student's performance. (Third interview with Rola, 20.4.2011)

Rola, like other teachers shown in the literature, might have been reluctant to implement CL as it required a lot of time and effort to plan for the activities, to conduct them in class, and to train and monitor students. Because Rola, like other teachers, was preoccupied with finishing the yearly plan, she might have found it much easier to give up CL most of the time and teach more traditionally. The reasons she articulated were most likely to be true especially the "habit" factor. As other teachers, Rola was used to traditional methods as they were part of her learning as well as early teaching experiences (before being exposed to new methods). In addition, traditional methods were the most common among other teachers, i.e. they were the most dominant in the school culture (informal conversation with a school inspector). Thus, it logically follows that such methods, which require less time and effort from her, to be used in her class too.

Giving up CL to check on individual student's performance reflected her beliefs about FLL, which fall into performance-based orientation rather than competence-based orientation (Bernstein, 2000), common in learner-centred teaching. This was evident as she was emphasising competitive, individualistic achievement rather than collaborative

learning and as she was attending to absences rather than presences, which is in contrast with learner-centred teaching.

The participants' minimal use of group work and reliance on rather more traditional teaching could also be related to their negative attitude towards group work, which Lana explained in the following excerpt.

We have our reservations concerning group work ... as students are of different ability, some [of them] depend on others to do the work ... All depend on one student, and others either start talking ... which is likely to cause disorder and chaos in the class. It requires monitoring; otherwise, it will be useless. I myself do not favour group work. (First interview with Lana, 12.3.2011)

Lana's attitude towards group work could most probably be derived from her difficulty in organising and managing groups and her worries about students' dependency on one student as well as maintaining order and discipline in class. This hints at her inadequate training in conducting group work as well as students' lack of training on working together, which is one objective in the revised curriculum (as presented earlier on p. 62). It also hints at the powerful influence of the school culture (discussed in the next section).

The following example is likely to reflect both Fatima's attitude to group work and her inability to conduct it. On that day, I, as usual, sent Fatima a message on her mobile informing her of attending her class. Her students were working in groups of five to write a letter advising their friend on how to eat healthily during the observed session (an activity presented in THEMES). Instead of monitoring her groups and facilitating their learning task, she approached me saying,

When you sent me the message, I wanted to tell you that I am having this activity, which is not much of help for you, [as there is] nothing to observe. (Observation 6, 23.4.2011)

Despite the importance of this activity as a writing follow-up on the reading lesson, Fatima underestimated the value of this group learning activity and used it just to relax and not to teach herself (transmit knowledge). This attitude was obvious when she said,

I am too tired, and Saturdays usually are tiring because I teach six consecutive sessions. (Observation 6, 23.4.2011)

Therefore, to her, group work was used when she was tired and wanted some rest. Her views of group work is a kind of relief, and teaching/ learning takes place when she is in the centre of her class explaining grammar deductively (the only subject I saw she taught), when she is the conductor or provider of knowledge as in traditional methods rather than when students are constructing knowledge themselves working and negotiating their learning in groups.

Besides her underestimated value of group work, Fatima, who did not receive adequate training on group work/CL, did not facilitate and ensure a successful implementation of the group activity by checking whether all group members were involved negotiating in the foreign language what and how to write this letter. As a result, not all the students in each group collaborated to complete the task, and the task was completed by almost one or two students of each group. Even those students who were working on the task used the native language rather than English in their discussions.

Besides the participants' little familiarity with group work/CL, insufficient training on implementing it, and negative attitudes towards it, cultural factors also impacted on the participants' use of group work/CL. These factors are related to student-teacher relationship, students' readiness to assume responsibility over their learning and to share authority in the classroom, professional support the participants receive in the schools, and classroom physical environment (further discussed below).

4.3 School Culture and Professional Context

The school culture and professional context impacted on teachers' conceptions as well as practice. This section consists of three sub-categories: (1) classroom physical environment (2) authority and student-teacher relationship, and (3) professional support. The third sub-category is divided into two: in-service training and participants' relationships with coordinator/supervisor and colleagues.

4.3.1 Classroom Physical Environment

What Schweisfurth (2011, p. 427) says about the realities of classrooms in developing countries applies to the classrooms observed in the 4 LPHS, "The ideal-typical LCE [learner-centred education] classroom as envisaged in the doctrine of progressivists ... is

far from the lived experience of most teachers and learners ...”. The classrooms in the 4 LPHS consisted of student benches as well as a teacher’s desk and a chair which were placed on a platform in most schools (discussed below). They were devoid of any instructional aid except for a chalkboard, which in some classrooms was in a terrible state such as the one in Rami’s and Lana’s; it was faded green with a lot of scars, not good enough to write on. All of the participants complained about the unavailability of sufficient resources in their schools such as CD (compact disc) or video players, LCD (Liquid Crystal Display) projectors, or any instructional/ resource materials.

All the participants received inadequate resources from their schools, which reflected negatively on their practice. For example, Lana and Rami, who teach in the same school, talked about having three LCDs in the whole school (the most equipped in comparison to the others), which made it necessary to book in advance. If sometimes they were lucky to do so, the power might be out due to the energy saving plan adopted in Lebanon. Thus, they might end up not using the LCD. Sally, who was complaining about the same problem, said that even though she needed to book the library where the LCD projector was found, *priority is to those who are teaching physics and chemistry*, so she might not be able to use the LCD if a physics teacher, for example, had planned to use it on that day and time. Such a priority reflects a lower status EFL teachers have in schools compared to their science counterparts. Although the Lebanese consider English as an important language to learn (Saba ‘Ayon, 2010; Saba ‘Ayon, 2011), this preference reflected that English was given a secondary importance with respect to sciences in schools. Such preference is dangerous because this priority most probably be translated into less effort from students in the English course compared to their effort in other subjects (an issue which merits researching in the future).

Even the accompanying instructional materials, namely the listening tapes and video cassettes, were neither available in their schools nor of good quality. Except for Rola and Lana (as the former was teaching in another school and the latter was a cycle II teacher trainer in NCERD), none of the other participants were familiar with these resources to the extent that May did not know even of their presence. In this case, the participants were not

given the means to carry out listening activities and expose the students to native speakers and hence implement the curricular reforms. According to Lana, most often she read the script herself or asked students to read it especially in case of a dialogue. But other participants, namely May and Rola, who did not even have the instructor's manual, including the script, ended up skipping such activities.

The impact of school facilities on the quality of teaching and learning processes was researched by Urwick and Junaidu (1991) in Nigerian primary schools, who found that school physical facilities contribute to the implementation of learner-centred teaching.

The availability of teachers' manuals and of other teaching aids (such as charts and models) also affected the extent to which lessons called for active contributions by the pupils. The variety of activities during lessons is a variable closely related to the 'pupil-centred' one. But variety was also much influenced by the provision of furniture: many tasks require firm desk-tops and group work may require rearrangement of the furniture. (p.24)

Thus, with the absence of teaching aids, teaching manuals, and suitable furniture, implementing CL was so challenging to the participants that they depended on more traditional practices. Such an environment did not resemble the one that socio-constructivists deem necessary for discovery and exploratory learning to take place (discussed earlier on p. 8). Schweisfurth (2011, P. 428) also discusses how “infrastructure, class size, teaching materials, and teacher capacity” can be barriers to the implementation of learner-centred teaching. Abdo (2000) also discussed the importance of the availability of instructional materials in facilitating teachers' implementation of the curriculum and in improving student achievement. Fullan (1991) lists a number of factors contributing to the implementation of policy reforms, some of which are the availability of resources and support (discussed below).

4.3.2 Authority and Student-Teacher Relationship

The degree of authority as well as control exerted and the type of relationship that exists between the teachers and students are crucial to successful implementation of the curricular reforms. One of the principles of learner-centred teaching is the shared responsibility between teachers and students. In order to allow students to be responsible for their learning, teachers must be ready to give up some of their authority or control in the

classroom, and simultaneously students should be prepared to assume such a responsibility. Otherwise, students are likely to be passive receptors rather than constructors of knowledge.

According to observation data, some participants tried to give some power to students in class, but students abused it most often. For example, whenever May and Rami tried to implement group or pair work and hence give students some responsibility in their classes, they ended up in a very chaotic class as the students took advantage of being grouped together to chat, tease each other, and tell jokes in Arabic instead of completing the task at hand. Such incidents show that the students were not trained enough to assume responsibility of their own learning, or they were not used to such new techniques. This is in line with Avalos (1991, p. 24), who emphasises the role of students' background.

The emphasis on student discovery with little teacher guidance may be inappropriate in those settings where students' background understanding and the methods to which they themselves have been subjected in their school do not provide a firm basis for self-learning and discovery learning.

Trying to justify what was happening in his class, Rami said,

I want to encourage students to speak up, participate in class; that's why I try not to control them. (Post observation 1 interview, 15.3.2011)

This quotation reflects Rami's intention to empower his students. However, because the students seemed to be used to being controlled by teachers and had never been trained on having an active role in class, they abused the power given to them by this participant. Nonetheless, this also pointed to a gap between what the teacher knew about learner-centred teaching and how he would have implemented it. This gap could be best attributed to the participant's inadequate training (as discussed earlier). By asking students to pair up and comment on each other's paragraphs, Rami assumed that the students would be able to do so without explaining the purpose of the task, the importance of their feedback to one another, and the way to give constructive feedback. However, the students were not able to do so because they need to be trained to work cooperatively. In fact, Gillies (2007, p.9) asserts that one of the difficult responsibilities a teacher has in cooperative learning pedagogy is "teaching students to learn how to operate in groups". Citing Chinn et al. (2000), Gillies argues that "students must be explicitly taught the skills needed to dialogue

together if they are to learn to use these skills to enrich their discourse and enhance their learning” (p. 8).

As to the other participants, though they claimed otherwise, they were almost in complete control of their classroom activities. For example, Fatima, who claimed to be friendly to students, was very authoritarian in her class to the extent that she neither allowed any of her students to ask her about the correction of their exams nor encouraged students’ questions as she used to make fun of or intimidate those who critically question an idea explained in class as in the following episode.

Student: Why do we say “the red shoe” but “I like red color”? [The two examples were written on the board by the teacher]

Teacher: You were not paying attention to my explanation because if you were, you would not ask this question.

Student: Yes, Miss, I was.

Teacher: Come to the chalkboard. What function does red has in the first phrase?

Student: adjective.

Teacher: Ok. But in the second phrase, we are referring to red colour in general. Did you understand now?

Student: [drooping her head] Yes, Miss. (Observation 1, 16.4.2011)

Besides the competency problem that was reflected in the teacher’s explanation, the teacher was not pleasant enough to encourage any student to ask a question, which is essential according to the principles of socio-constructivism and learner-centred teaching. First, she accused the student of not paying attention. Second, she intimidated the student by asking her to come to the board and asked her these questions. Although the teacher’s explanation was still obscure, the student might have said that she had understood to avoid any unpleasant reaction from the teacher. Comparing this participant’s behaviour with the principles of learning according to socio-constructivists, we find that instead of encouraging students’ questions as an indication of their learning, she responded very negatively to the student’s question, and by doing so, she obstructed any other inquiry attempt by another student. In other words, she blocked their learning process. In fact, Comber (1988 in Gould, 1996, p.94) asserts that “the most important step for teachers who want to create a powerful learning environment is to facilitate the children’s sense that they can trust that they can ask”. Comparing between what she claimed her view of her role

was, *a gardener who takes good care of his/ her plants*, with what happened in this episode, one can easily discern the incongruence between Fatima's reported role and her realised role in her classroom.

Other participants such as Lana and Rola allowed students some freedom in class (such as drinking water which was not allowed in other classes) and encouraged students' talk in the form of answers to the teachers' questions. However, these teachers were mostly in control of all classroom activities, and students did not have any control over their learning, which was in conflict with constructivism. These teachers were trying to maintain some order in their classes as Lana said.

The first two months are tiring for me to set my rules and make students so disciplined and get used to my strategy. They don't do anything that is likely to upset me because they like me. (First interview with Lana, 12.3.2011)

Although this positive relationship between the students and teacher is so essential in the teaching/learning process (Clark and Trafford, 1995 cited in Dornyei, 2001), it is not enough to help students construct their learning. Students also need to be given real learning opportunities where they can receive rich, interesting input and produce comprehensible output in negotiating and constructing their FLL.

The logical explanations for the participants' control are multiple. The participants' lack of deep understanding of learner-centred teaching is one factor (as discussed earlier). Another factor is related to the impact of Lortie's (1975) "apprenticeship of observation" on the participants' behaviour. As the participants used to view their teachers as *God's representatives on Earth (Sally)*, *an authority (Lana)*, *or an ideal (Fatima)*, *a perfect figure who never makes mistakes and whose authority is never questioned (Rami)*, most of the participants most often projected the same image to their students. Their teachers' influence was so powerful that it affected their classroom practice too. Because teacher's pre-service failed to challenge these images, most of the participants' practice did not reflect their reported conceptions of teaching and fell into more traditional teaching methods similar to those used by their language teachers as discussed earlier in the first section. Likewise, the effect of Rola's learning experiences as a language learner must

have been so profound that it made her filter what to adopt from her in-service training (CL) and what to consider as valuable or worth following in her classroom.

Third, the participants have not experienced this shared authority during their training. As mentioned earlier, the trainers in the pre-service course were mostly traditional and relied heavily on lecturing. Most importantly, schools expect the teacher to keep order and control in her/his class. The participants were expected to keep control in their classroom, and even productive noise (resulting from group work) was not tolerated by floor superintendents. This was one reason why Sally gave up group work activities as she explained below.

You know sometimes the supervisor [superintendent] comes in and complains about the noise and says, "There's too much noise" when the students are working in groups. So usually we stop the activity. (Third interview with Sally, 30.4.2011)

In addition, the fact that teachers' desks and chairs were located on a platform that overlooked students' seats gave more power to teachers than students. It communicated the idea that teachers and students were not of equal authority, and a submissive, obedient role was expected from students. Most often, the participants presided over the platform especially when they gave instructions and explained a lesson. They moved around the classroom to check for students' homework or to give help to a student.

To maintain control and ensure students' conformity, the participants- namely Fatima, May, Sally, Rola, and Rami- sometimes resorted to physical punishment such as standing in the corner, copying texts four to five times, or dismissing students out of class. This environment is completely opposite to the "interactive and supportive environment" recommended in the revised English curriculum (Ghaith, 2003, p. 451), which is conducive to language learning.

4.3.3 Professional Support

The impact of the participants' relationships with their colleagues as well as their superiors and the influence of their in-service training on their practice are discussed in this subcategory.

4.3.3.1 Participants' Relationships with Coordinator/Supervisor and Colleagues

The participants' relationships with their coordinators, supervisors, and colleagues influenced their practice too. More specifically, carrying out the curricular reforms in the participants' EFL classes was also affected by the amount of support these participants received from their colleagues or coordinators. For example, Sally complained about lack of support from her coordinator and about complaints from the floor superintendent when using group work (discussed above), which pushed her to assume a knowledge transmission role and teach traditionally.

Our coordinator although she's helpful, she's traditional... What I meant is you can't apply new models in teaching deduction, induction, organize groups. You can't apply these in your class as this may take some more time and you have to stick to the syllabus... so you feel it's better to go on and teach mechanically and traditionally to finish the curriculum. (First interview with Sally, 14.3.2011)

The pressure that the participants faced in their workplace to follow the syllabus (yearly plan) was likely to impact their choice of their teaching style. In fact, Haser and Star (2009, p. 299) argue that “pressures related to the tension between the curriculum pace controlled by the Ministry and participants' concern about the students' learning had considerable influence on how participants considered the effective means of ...teaching”

May complained about the problems she was facing due to the unavailability of the coordinator in her school. The following episode can best picture what May was suffering from. During a subsequent interview with her, she seemed very frustrated as she felt her students were not ready to be tested on the material she was trying to teach in that session.

Researcher: Why do you have to include this material on the test if you don't feel your students are ready yet?

May: because Rola and I are having a common exam, and Rola has already included a question on this material.

Researcher: Why did Rola prepare the test by herself and not both of you?

May: Because the school head teacher asked her to do so. The problem is not who prepares the test, but I did not teach this lesson earlier because this lesson is cancelled according to the syllabus sent by the Ministry.

Researcher: Did you tell Rola that?

May: Yes, but Rola told me that she did not read the syllabus and asked me to teach that lesson as she had included only one question from it in the test.

Researcher: Why don't you discuss this problem with your coordinator?

May: (smiling) because I have never met with him as he is always unavailable. He only comes to school when he has classes. You know every teacher here teaches what he/she wants. No two teachers teach the same materials.

Researcher: What about talking to the director?

May: (Sounding hopeless) [It's] Too late! I don't think anything will change! (Post observation 6 interview with May, 23.4.2011)

This episode showed the difficult situation May was in. As a trainee herself, May was in need of support and guidance in school from her trainers. However, in the absence of their help as the trainers visit the trainees' class once or twice per year for assessment, the coordinator and EFL colleagues were expected to provide support. In the absence of the coordinator, May was left on her own struggling to survive in the profession. Another point worth discussing is teaching a lesson in the book that was not on the yearly plan sent by the Ministry. This indicates that no one was there to follow up with what the teachers were doing, which confirmed what Sally said about follow up.

The aforementioned quotes reflect an unfriendly, unsupportive relationship between the participants and their coordinators or administration. They even depict a kind of imposition practised on the participants, which hints at an authority distance kept between the participants and their coordinators/ administrations. Such a distance, together with that between the participants and their students, impeded the implementation of learner-centred teaching (c.f. Schweisfurth, 2011).

The example above also hints at the participants' views of teaching, which could be described as examination-driven. In fact, I had the chance to see some of the participants' exams during my observation sessions. Almost all the questions on the exams were at the memorisation level, and very few were at comprehension level (according to Bloom's Taxonomy) but none beyond that or reach the analysis level, which is a required skill in the reforms (see English Curriculum section, p. 62). For example, in one question students were instructed to give the comparative and superlative forms of adjective words in isolation. This question assesses students' memorisation of these forms rather than their ability to use them properly in their communication, which is a primary objective in the curricular reforms. Not only were written exams based on memorisation, but the

assessment of oral fluency/ communication was also based on memorisation. The following example illustrates this situation.

Memo: In one session when Rola was having an oral communication test, she called on one student at a time. That student approached her; she was sitting at her desk on the platform while the student was standing on the ground level [a very fearful experience and reflecting unequal powers as discussed before]. The test consisted of reading a paragraph from the lessons taught before, one memorised comprehension question which the teacher rated as general about any of the selections studied earlier, some other questions (could be one only) on the paragraph the student read, a question about the meaning of words (memorised), and a grammar question such as picking an adjective from the read paragraph and giving the comparative and superlative forms. Thus, it was all based on rote learning as all the questions asked were discussed in class and their answers were written in the students' copybooks. (26.4.2011)

What was surprising to me was Rola's belief that her oral assessment was not sufficient yet valid to assess students' oral communication as shown in her answer to my probes.

Rola: I was supposed to include listening skills too. Students were supposed to listen to a text, and then answer comprehension questions on the text. However, I didn't do it this time, and I can't claim that I did this before, but I might do this in another assessment.

Researcher: Do you think this is valid enough to reflect students' fluency?

Rola: [surprisingly] Isn't one general question [about the assigned reading lessons] enough to do this? (Post observation 6 interview, 26.4.2011)

Again this incident reflected incongruence between Rola's reported conceptions of teaching and her practice. What was preventing her from carrying out her knowledge was most probably the time she had to put in preparing for a listening text and comprehension questions on as these participants had no instructional aids or any resource materials available to them in their schools. However, her assertion that the exam was valid also reflected her lack of deep understanding of what oral fluency is, how to assess it, and more generally what the curricular reforms were all about.

Assessing oral fluency was different in the other schools. To Sally, Rami, and Lana, it was equated to students' class participation, which could be only restricted to answering the teachers' questions in phrases or chunks (as already discussed). The reason for such a discrepancy among the participants was the lack of clear explanation from the Ministry of Education of what constitutes an oral communication exam. All of what was

communicated to head teachers was that the English grade for a student should be a composite of a grade on a written test (including reading comprehension and writing), an oral one, and dictation. In other words, there was a policy but no procedures for implementing this policy. Cooper (1989) discussed the importance of setting procedures for every policy if these policies are to be translated into classroom practice.

Where substantive policies set out what is to be accomplished, procedural policies state how some goal is to be attained... Substantive policies cannot succeed if the means for their implementation are not specified. Means must be found to promote or enforce policy if the policy is to be more than an expression of good intentions. (p. 90)

With the absence of a clear procedure of how to assess the students on these three domains, it was left to the teachers to interpret this policy based on what they understood an oral test should be like. Such understanding was derived from their conceptions of learning and teaching, which were affected by their experiences as language learners themselves. As a result, Rola's oral communication/fluency exam came to be an oral recitation similar to the ones she took when she was a language learner in school.

In addition, supervisors and/or inspectors were not helpful to the participants either. Their classroom visits were evaluative and so stressful that May described her inspector's visit as an *air raid*. She complained about the unfriendly attitude of inspectors basing her generalisation on her experiences with the inspector she had the previous year.

May: She [inspector] used to come, see my preparation, and say, "it's wrong to do this, do that".

Researcher: Did she use to listen to your rationale for doing this?

May: NO. Once I tried to explain, immediately told me, "I didn't ask you"; "do this what I tell you!" (First interview with May, 10.3.2011)

Such commands cannot help the student teachers improve their practice or reflect on it because teachers are unlikely to apply a strategy if they do not see its value, are not convinced of its appropriateness to their class, and cannot see how it might help them achieve their goals. Such a threatening, authoritative relationship between the teachers and the inspector is unlikely to help the teachers develop or improve their practice. In fact, Perren (2001) attributes the success of his attempt to improve teaching performance to several factors, one of which is the use of non-threatening elicitation techniques in

discussions as it is likely to encourage the participants to critically reflect on their performance. In addition, according to Ali (2000, p. 177), “Supervisor’s work ... [which] is seen largely as the identification of deficits in teachers’ work ... obviously does not contribute to teachers’ professional development”. Britten (1988) also asserts if trainees are not made aware of the usefulness and value of a certain suggested method, they are unlikely to adopt it. His rationale for this is “attitudes command skills” (p. 6). Akcan and Tata (2010) not only discuss the importance of feedback from supervisors to trainees, but also emphasise that the kind of feedback makes a difference in developing the trainees professionally. In comparing between the feedback given by the trainees’ supervisors and those given by cooperating teachers, the researchers showed that the supervisors encouraged reflective thinking which is likely to help the trainees to be critical of their own practice as well as helping them develop professional autonomy, whereas cooperating teachers’ feedback was more like advice of how trainees’ practice could be improved. Thus, less dialogic, interactive communication existed between trainees and cooperating teachers. Although the trainees welcomed such advice, it did not help them understand the pedagogic logic behind it. The cooperating teachers “focused on immediate classroom practice rather than wider educational issues [as supervisors did] as well as practical rather than theoretical [issues]” (p. 165). The researchers concluded by stressing the importance of reflective, interactive feedback given both orally and in writing.

In short, with poor resources and inadequate support, the participants’ practice suffered, and it was almost impossible for them to implement the curricular reforms and to have learner-centred classes.

4.3.3.2 Participants’ In-service Training

As to in-service training, none of the participants had any in cycle III (grade levels 7-9) as there were no cycle III trainers in Sidon as informed by Lana, a cycle II (grade levels 4-6) trainer, and as in-service training in LPHS was optional rather than mandatory (discussed above). However, some of them had training in cycle II. The length and the effectiveness of that training varied from one participant to another. For example, Rola, who said, *I am the luckiest teacher [as] I was always selected to participate in workshops*, attended two 15-20 day workshops, the purpose of which was to train teachers on how to implement the

revised English curriculum (as described earlier). These workshops, as she described, were very helpful and practical. Unfortunately, the other participants' training consisted of one- or two- day workshop, which was about reading strategies or techniques to teach vocabulary as they said. Still the participants had varying opinions of these workshops. May and Lana believed that the workshops they attended were of help and essential, whereas Fatima had such a different opinion that she could not remember exactly what the workshop was about, *vocabulary or any other thing. I don't quite remember... I don't think it was beneficial.* (First interview with Fatima, 12.3.2011)

Exposure to new techniques and roles through one-to -two day workshops or through a course during pre-service is not sufficient for the teachers to be able to apply such techniques and assume progressive roles, for “teachers cannot change their practice in a meaningful way simply by being told to do so” (Ponte , 2005, p. 274). In addition, Little (1993), Harvey (1999) as well as Guskey and Yoon (2009) criticised such training workshops as inadequate, and the latter recommended that trainees need to be monitored when applying the new technique in their classrooms. They assert that “Educators at all levels need just-in-time, job-embedded assistance as they struggle to adapt new curricula and new instructional practices to their unique classroom contexts” (p. 497). Nabhani and Bahous (2010) suggested that teachers be exposed to mandatory professional development and have mentors who are likely to help these teachers in their application of their training. Like Ponte (2005), Nabhani and Bahous recommended action research as an effective strategy for teacher professional development. Unfortunately, the participants had not received sufficient in-service training to be able to implement the curricular reforms in their classroom practice.

Despite the inadequacy of these short training workshops, what deserves our attention here is the different attitudes the participants had towards these workshops. While May and Lana viewed them as helpful, Fatima did not. It was due to their attitudes towards the training itself. May and Lana, who were exposed to different reading activities in the workshops such as warm-up and follow-up activities, felt that these could help them in presenting the reading text more interestingly to students. In fact, I saw Lana, during my

observations, begin her reading lesson with a warm-up activity, helping the students through eliciting questions to describe the picture in their reading book before discussing the reading selection. However, Fatima, whom I never saw (during observation sessions) teaching vocabulary words, but assigning them for students to look them up in a dictionary at home, felt the vocabulary workshop as not beneficial probably because she did not feel the need to learn to teach vocabulary words; that is, she did not regard the material being taught as relevant and important (c.f. Chamber, 1999; Dornyei, 2001, and Brophy, 2004 among others). In addition, Ardasheva and Brown (2011, p.17) found that the perceived value of the training for “immediate and future professional goals” is one main reason for the teacher to enroll in an in-service training course. In addition, Ofsted (2002) reported that the success of the in-service training for teachers was partly due to its ability to address the individual needs of the teachers and their schools in addition to monitoring teachers’ implementation. According to Ofsted (2006), teaching and learning in 29 schools in England improved when the in-service training addressed teachers’ as well as schools’ needs and when implementation of the new techniques were monitored in the trainees’ classrooms. In other words, if the teacher does not feel a need to develop in one area and if monitoring is absent, then in-service training is likely to be ineffective as in the case of Fatima.

In short, in-service training was almost absent with respect to these participants to the extent some of them had not received any since their pre-service. This was partly due to the absence of cycle III trainers in the city of Sidon and partly due to the absence of mandatory professional development policy which Nabhani and Bahous (2010) recommended. If “through professional development activities, new teachers are ... helped to resolve challenges and issues confronted during their first years in the field” (Nabhani and Bahous, 2010, p. 211), then the participants’ survival or development with such insufficient pre-service and almost absence of in-service training is extremely challenging. This situation contradicts with a lot of researchers’ views on teachers’ education. For instance, Brown (1994, p. 425) states that “one of the most interesting things about teaching is that you never stop learning”. Cheng (2001) also asserts that “teachers are inevitably in need of continuous lifelong professional education...” (pp. 27-28). Thus, to

keep them up-to date and help them resolve the challenges facing them such as group work and classroom management, these participants need to undergo in-service training followed by a supervised implementation of the new ideas in teachers' classroom whereby the role of the mentor/supervisor is to provide the participants constructive feedback on their performance and not evaluate it.

Overall, though some of the participants underwent little in-service training in cycle II in the form of one-day workshops, all of these participants, except Rola, did not receive any explicit training on CL during their pre-service or in-service and did not experience it themselves in their training. However, these participants, according to the curricular reforms, were expected to implement CL into their classrooms. In addition, although they were not professionally supported and were expected to keep control in their classrooms, they were supposed to implement the reforms. A lot of contradictions exist that make us question the appropriateness of these reforms in LPHS and the procedures followed to help Lebanese EFL teachers implement these reforms.

4.4 Conclusion

Based on the above findings, I can describe the situation as follows. The curricular reforms, which have been officially in operation since 1997, have not been translated properly into the EFL classrooms in LPHS for the following factors (see figure 4.1 below). First, the participants have not *sufficiently and appropriately* been trained to carry out these reforms in their classrooms. Rather, these participants have superficially been introduced to these reforms which the participants may have found attractive but did not fully understand and were not totally convinced of their value as they were only lectured about, were not made aware of their importance in the teaching/learning process, and did not experience them in their training. In other words, this inadequate training did not much impact on the participants' established conceptions of teaching, which were greatly influenced by their experiences as language learners. As a result, the participants' conceptions of what constitutes good teaching in FLL were mostly incompatible with the curricular reforms. In addition, the school culture and context, in terms of orientation, resources, physical environment, and professional support, did not help the participants sustain their few attempts to implement traces of these reforms into their classrooms. On

the contrary, lack of resources, emphasis on the syllabus or yearly plan, and superintendents' worries about maintaining control and order in the classrooms discouraged these attempts and reinforced more established ways of teaching. In addition, based on the data on training, it seems that the situation with the trainers and teacher educators is very similar to that with the participants in terms of knowledge, understanding, and orientation to the curricular reforms, which makes those trainers and teacher educators lack the means to prepare the participants to implement these reforms.

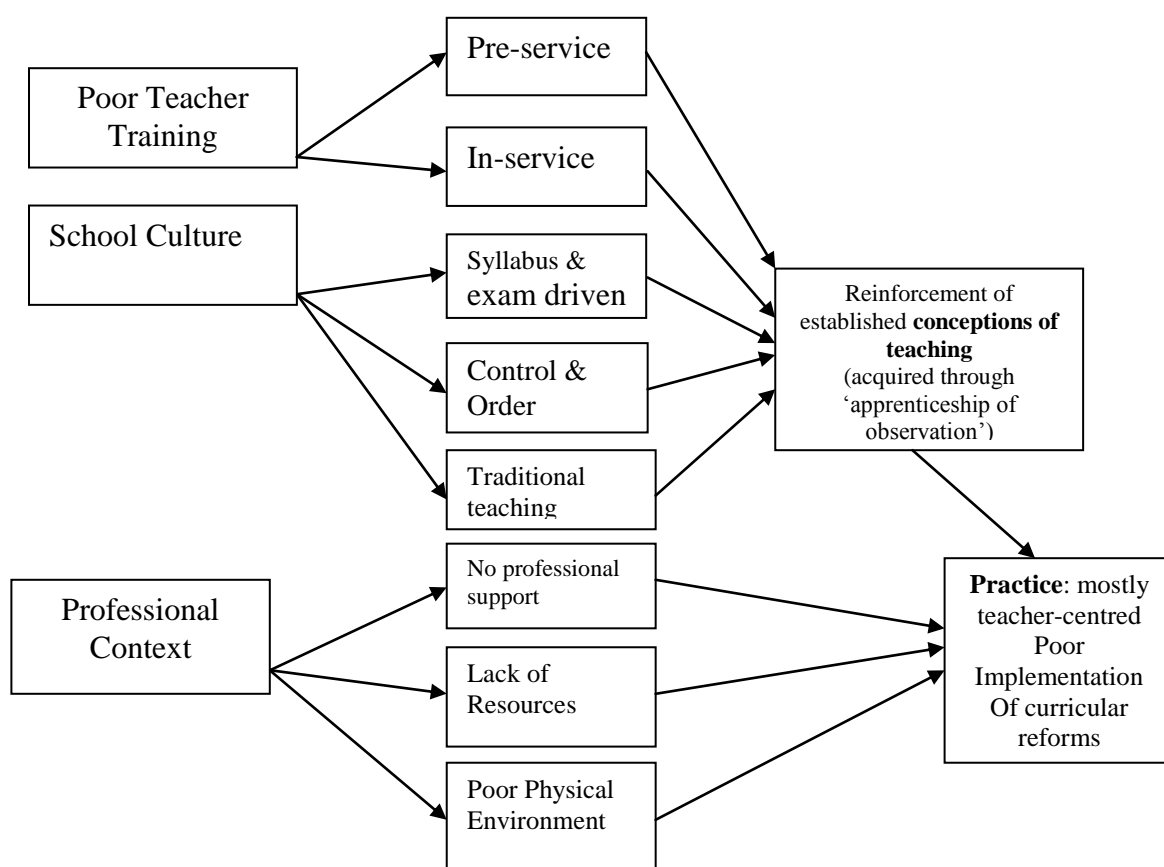


Figure 4.1 Factors Affecting Teachers' Implementation of Curricular Reforms in Their EFL Classrooms

Chapter Five: Conclusion, Contribution to Knowledge, Implications, and Reflection

5.1 Conclusion

Overall conclusions indicate that there is a discrepancy between what the participants assume their conceptions and their role as EFL teachers are and what they realise in their classrooms. While the participants report that their conceptions of teaching lean towards the learner-centred end of the two-pole educational continuum, their realised conceptions are closer towards the other end (teacher-centred). Despite their descriptions of learner-centred pedagogy as maximising students' role in the teaching/learning process, this has not been revealed much in their classroom practice. However, their realised conceptions can be described as mostly teacher-centred with some traces of CL and a very minimal, marginal role is given to students.

Nevertheless, their description of their conceptions as learner-centred is related to their lack of deep understanding of what constitutes learner-centred teaching. Drawing on the sources from which teachers construct their conceptions of teaching (namely prior learning experiences, teacher education, teaching experiences, curriculum, school context, and culture), I find that these participants' teacher education is the least influential, leaving the greatest impact on their conceptions to their prior learning experiences and school context as well as culture.

The participants' prior learning experiences as language learners are very influential in the participants' conceptions as well as practice. Not being sufficiently informed about CL (although it is emphasised in the curricular reforms), adequately exposed to and encouraged as well as provided the means to implement CL, the participants have almost nothing left to rely on in their teaching except the images of their previous language teachers and the teaching trend followed in the school. Having images of both strict, harsh teachers and friendly, caring teachers, *most* of the participants tried to avoid being viewed as the former by their students and wanted to be viewed as the latter. Thus, they tried to adopt the same qualities (friendliness and care) that made their teachers memorable to them. By doing so, the participants believed that their conceptions were learner-centred

rather than teacher-centred. In the same vein, they adopted the same conceptions of teaching as their memorable teachers. As none of these teachers was reported to have assumed a role other than a knowledge transmitter or used any progressive teaching methods (such as group work or CL), the participants did neither regard these methods as essential to their students' learning nor develop a positive attitude towards them. As a result, the participants drew mostly on traditional methods with few instances of group activities, not all of which were successful or achieved the objective. Not only did they draw on their positive images of their teachers, some of the participants resorted to their negative images of strict harsh teachers when punishing their students such as asking students to stand up in the corner of the classroom or to copy the reading text three to four times on paper.

Another conclusion is that their teacher preparation (pre- and in-service) has been inadequate. Instead of challenging the images of teaching the participants bring to their pre-service course, the Kafaa Programme and the trainers confirmed these images through marginalising the observation and practicum parts of the programme as well as emphasising the theoretical, traditional content of the course and the trainers' adoption of the same traditional teaching methods depicted in these images. According to Shulman (1986, p. 9), who categorises teacher content knowledge into subject, pedagogical and curricular knowledge, the participants' training has not been sufficient enough to provide them with these three types of knowledge as competency problems have been identified in their performance and as they have been unable to realise the curricular reforms and use CL in their classes. They have not been provided with case knowledge either, which is "knowledge of specific well documented, and richly described events" (Shulman, 1986, p. 11). This case knowledge could be "examples of specific instances of practice ... [or] exemplars of principles, exemplifying in their detail a more abstract proposition or theoretical claim" (Shulman, 1986, p. 11). Shulman (1986) suggests three types of case knowledge: (1) prototypes which "exemplify theoretical principles", (2) precedents which "capture and communicate principles of practice or maxims", and (3) parables which "convey norms or values" (p. 11). Knowledge of how a teacher taught a lesson on English idioms or how another teacher dealt with students' unacceptable repeated behaviour such

as missing the required textbook could be examples of this knowledge. Such knowledge is important because it is memorable, which makes it easy for the teacher to remember and to apply it in a particular situation. The participants' inability to reflect on their own practice and explain why an activity has failed or succeeded hints at a gap in their education. These participants lack strategic knowledge which Collins et al. (1989, p. 477) define as "The usually tacit knowledge that underlies an expert's ability to make use of concepts, facts, and procedures ... to solve problems and carry out tasks" and which "must be generated to extend understanding beyond the principle to the wisdom of practice" (Shulman, 1986, p. 13). Therefore, their education is inadequate to help them develop competency in the subject taught (English), to evaluate and reflect on their practice, and to realise the curricular reforms in their classes.

In addition, the disjuncture between the teacher education programme and school curricula could be responsible for the participants' poor teacher preparation. Although the Kafaa Programme, NCERD (initiated curriculum reforms) and LPHS relate to the Lebanese Ministry of Education and although they have a common goal (improving learning/teaching process in LPHS), these entities seem to work so independently that they neither communicate nor collaborate with each other. Each one functions separately rather than in conjunction with one another. Thus, they are too independent to complement each other and hence achieve their common goal. While the school English curriculum has been revised, the Kafaa Programme has not accommodated for these revisions to enable the teacher trainees to incorporate them in their classrooms and survive the challenges of the curricular reforms. Despite their reported familiarity with CL (as they were lectured about during their training), the participants lacked deep understanding of it and of its value as a learner-centred teaching practice, which resulted in their inability to implement it properly and their reluctance to use it frequently in their classrooms.

In other words, teacher education was of little influence on the participants' conceptions as well as practice. Drawing on socio-constructivism and on my stance as a social constructivist, I believe that the participants needed to construct their own knowledge of CL during their teacher education so that they would be able to implement it in their

practice. Instead of being instructed on this pedagogy, they needed to co-construct this knowledge themselves while negotiating their meanings with other trainees and their trainers. By doing so, they would come to better understand the principles underlying this pedagogy through comparing them with what they already know about foreign language teaching/learning (existing schemes) through Lortie's (1975) "apprenticeship of observation" and assimilating those experiences that fit into their old schemes as well as accommodating the new knowledge by reordering or restructuring of their acquired schemes. In other words, the new learning experience (construction of their knowledge in their training) would challenge their existing conceptions of foreign language learning/teaching which they have acquired as a result of their own learning experiences as language learners. Unless they experience the difference themselves in both ways of acquiring knowledge (transmission of knowledge vs. construction of knowledge), these participants are not likely to internalise the new approach, implement CL in their classrooms, and hence enable their students to construct their FLL. When the participants become meta-cognitively aware of the importance of learners' constructing their own knowledge to FLL, they are most likely to apply such an approach in their classrooms and help their students construct their own FLL. Then these teachers will most probably provide their students with genuine tasks (similar to those on pp.66-67) that require them to cooperate with other peers, negotiate and discuss their understandings in English. As a result, students will most likely come to understand that English is a means of communication as well as negotiation, a tool to accomplish a task, an integral part of their learning processes rather than only a subject to be memorised and mechanically tested on. Therefore, both teachers' and students' views of foreign language learning/teaching and about the foreign language itself are most likely to be altered, and curriculum reforms will most probably be properly implemented.

Besides their learning experiences as language learners, the school context, as well as culture, has had a powerful impact on the participants' conceptions as well as practice. To start with, the school culture reinforced the participants' established conceptions of teaching acquired through their learning experiences. Moreover, the participants did not receive enough support in their professional context when they tried to implement traces of

the curricular reforms. Neither the physical working environment nor the participants' superiors represented by coordinators, inspectors, and/or superintendents were supportive and encouraging enough for their use of CL or group work through either their complaints about the noise in the classroom or their commands to stick to the yearly plan, which is only a list of the units to be covered during the academic year. As the school culture followed a performance-based orientation and was textbook and syllabus driven, it was almost impossible for some participants not to follow the trend in their practice.

To answer the problem in question about the low proficiency level of LPHS graduates, we can attribute this to one possible explanation, the poor implementation of the curricular reforms in LPHS and the use of more traditional teacher-centred practices of teaching instead. Foreign language learning is still regarded as a behaviouristic activity (stimulus/response) rather than as a social constructivist activity. Consequently, teachers are still in almost complete control over class activities. In other words, mostly they still teach traditionally and maintain the transmission of knowledge role, and their students are the receivers of this knowledge. That is, students in these schools are generally passive learners on the receiving end of the continuum, and they are not provided with real learning opportunities where they can practise how to negotiate their learning and construct their knowledge via the foreign language. The teachers' main concern is still *form* and *accuracy* rather than *use* and *communication*. Memorisation and rote learning are still mostly used in the EFL class. Thus, the students' foreign language output is very limited and restricted to a few utterances, mostly phrases, in response to the teacher's questions (or stimuli), and the native language still occupies a major part of students', as well as some teachers', output.

In short, although the revised curriculum has officially been in operation since 1997, the curricular reforms have not been implemented properly and traditional teaching practices are still dominant in most of the participants' EFL classes. All in all, the poverty of the initial as well as in-service teacher education, the weakness of the interpretation of the curriculum in schools and the school culture combine to simply allow the reproduction of

the participants' own experiences of learning English, rather than altering their conceptions and hence practice.

5.2 Contribution to Knowledge

As this study is the first to investigate Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching in LPHS, answering my research questions, while relying on the collected and analysed data, should fill a gap in the literature about Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching and their practice and contribute new knowledge to the field. As to the first question, *how compatible are Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching with the curricular reforms*, the data reveal that their conceptions are mostly incompatible with the curricular reforms. Despite the teachers' claims about being learner-centred, their conceptions as reflected in their practice are mostly teacher-centred, whereas the curricular reforms call for learner-centred teaching. Their realised role in their classrooms is mostly that of a knowledge transmitter rather than a facilitator of students' learning. Because I argued in chapter one that teachers' conceptions of teaching (knowledge, belief, and thinking) are liable to facilitate or hinder the teachers' implementation of curricular reforms in their classrooms, the participants' conceptions of teaching, incompatible with the reforms, hinder the participants' translation of these reforms into their classrooms, and these conceptions *greatly* influence the participants' classroom practice. This answers the second research question, *to what extent do these conceptions influence the teachers' classroom practice*; that is, what these teachers know, believe in and think about foreign language learning is reflected in their classroom practice. Most of the observed participants' EFL classes were mostly teacher-centred, and traditional teaching practices were mostly employed.

As to the third question, *what is the role of the teachers' prior learning experiences as language learners in their conceptions and practice*, these experiences exert the greatest impact on the teachers' conceptions as well as practice. Their learning experiences as language learners have shaped their own conceptions of teaching especially in the absence of a good initial teacher education programme which could have challenged these outdated conceptions and replaced them by ones that suit the curricular reforms. As a result, the participants have to rely on the images of their teachers in their classroom practice.

The fourth question, *how do these teachers view their (pre-service and in-service) education and how does it contribute to their practice*, reveals that Lebanese EFL teachers do not receive a real pre-service as they are assigned teaching loads together with their coursework and observation and with very minimal, if not absence of, follow-up, which results in a very stressful experience for the participants. Second, their preparation is mostly theoretical and traditional as the trainers themselves adopt traditional teaching methods, *lecturing*, in exposing the trainees to learner-centred pedagogy without *explicitly* and *sufficiently* training the teacher trainees on the recommended methods to use in their classrooms. Thus, the trainees lack models or simulations of how these new methods could be implemented in the classrooms. Most importantly, CL, which is central in the reforms, is almost absent in their training. The participants are neither trained on how to implement CL in their classrooms nor made meta-cognitively aware of the centrality and importance of CL in the reforms, which highlights a gap between teacher preparation in the Kafaa Programme and their expected performance in schools. As a result, the participants have become superficially familiar with CL, but they have not been able to implement it properly and translate the reforms into their classroom practice.

As to the last research question, *to what extent do the school culture and professional context impact on Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions as well as practice*, the school culture and professional context, besides the participants' learning experiences, exert a great impact on the participants' conceptions and practice. In fact, both the school culture and professional context reinforce the outdated teachers' conceptions of teaching shaped by their learning experiences. The poor support the participants received in their schools when implementing CL or group work, and the incompatible school culture (with the reforms) that is performance-based, examination- as well as syllabus-driven and that lacks all the necessary physical facilities and resources for CL, coupled with some of the participants' shaky commitment to the profession and negative attitudes towards the reform, made the participants reluctant, if not unable, to employ it in their classes. In addition, this little support and the school culture made the participants preoccupied with finishing the lessons on the yearly plan and more dependent on the traditional knowledge

transmission role which their memorable teachers used to have in their teaching and which is the most common among other teachers in their schools.

Finally, having found that the revised English curriculum, whose one main objective is to enable Lebanese learners “to communicate effectively, orally or in writing, in different situations and settings” (NCERD, 1997 P.148), is not being implemented properly in the classrooms and that teachers still teach mainly for exams, emphasise form and accuracy over communication and use, and control almost all classroom activities, I began to understand why graduates of LPHS, unlike their counterparts in the private sector which follows the same English curriculum, are unable to express themselves in at least one complete sentence in English.

5.2.1 Need for Further Research

As this research was done in one community in Lebanon (an urban, Muslim community), further research is recommended in different communities, a Christian or a Druze community as well as in different rural Lebanese communities, to find about other Lebanese EFL teachers’ conceptions of teaching and their practice. Another area of research could be investigating other factors in schools that might be responsible for LPHS students’ low proficiency in English.

5.3 Implications

In this section, I am presenting implications on two levels: (1) EFL in LPHS and (2) education in Lebanon and the Arab world.

5.3.1 Foreign Language Learning in LPHS

With all the hurdles facing EFL teachers in LPHS, implementing the curricular reforms seems to be a very unrealistic goal in LPHS. Thus, within these realities of LPHS, CL, which requires a lot of facilities and library resources, as well as teacher capabilities, seems to be a farfetched end. Instead of adopting these reforms from other contexts where they were successfully implemented, curriculum designers could have carefully studied the context and adjusted these reforms to be in harmony with our own public school culture. A competence-based pedagogy cannot work in a performance-based orientation as well as a textbook and examination driven culture. Therefore, these curricular reforms need to be

adjusted in a way that suits the professional context as well as culture. For example, we could adopt in LPHS an approach in line with O'Sullivan's (2004) adaptive model and Hu's (2002) eclectic approach that focus on learning rather than on the learner, i.e. using whatever teaching technique that brings about students' learning.

Because the Ministry of Education in Lebanon, like other Lebanese Ministries, is underfunded, the best investment they can make is in their teachers. In other words, EFL teachers would benefit by undergoing some intensive training conducted by qualified trainers to (1) challenge their already existing conceptions of teaching, which are incompatible with new theories of FLL, (2) accommodate new conceptions that are congruent with new trends of FLL, and (3) equip them with necessary skills that enable them to plan, prepare, and implement activities that best help students learn.

To better prepare teacher trainees to implement curricular reforms, more communication and cooperation between curriculum designers, teacher education programmes, and schools are recommended. New trainees should develop meta-cognitive awareness of the curricular reforms, receive sufficient training on implementing them, have a positive attitude towards the reforms, and be encouraged in their schools to use them to be able to realise them in their classroom practice. Moreover, it is suggested that emphasis be on the quality of learning instead of quantity. Thus, the yearly plan includes not only the units to be covered during the academic year but also the teaching strategies teachers are expected to follow in these units. As progressive teaching methods (that require students' involvement in the teaching/learning process) are more time consuming than traditional ones, the yearly plan should be realistic enough to allow teachers time to implement these methods rather than to give them up to finish more units on the plan.

In addition, the Ministry of Education may need to reconsider the selection criteria for EFL teachers and to adopt better teacher preparation. First, questions on the written test that are based on rote learning and memorisation could be replaced by others that better reflect the English proficiency/competency of the candidate. Second, oral fluency should be added to these selection criteria to determine the oral proficiency level of the candidate. Because

oral exams are usually time-consuming, it is suggested that only those who pass the written test take the oral one, and the candidates that pass this test would be the ones to be recruited. Then these candidates undergo a one-year pre-service training without being assigned any teaching workload in schools except for their practicum in the second semester. The training should be balanced between theories and practice. In line with Shulman's (1987) teacher education reform, the training should help the trainees: (1) to understand what to be taught, (2) transform their understanding to instructions that their students can comprehend, (3) evaluate their students' understanding as well as their own performance, and (4) reflect on the teaching/ learning process to arrive at new comprehension of the whole process (including student learning, subject matter, purpose, pedagogy, etc.). The trainers themselves should help the trainees develop meta-cognitive awareness of these procedures, and they should also use progressive teaching methods so that they serve as models for the trainees. After finishing their training, the newly trained teachers need not to be left on their own especially during their first year. They should be assigned mentors who help them survive the challenges of the profession. Finally, professional development should be made regular and mandatory for all the teachers in LPHS.

Finally, teachers should be financially and mentally satisfied in their professional contexts. Feeling financially satisfied, teachers would be able to dedicate more time for their profession and not have to take up more work in order to make ends meet at the end of every month. Besides, a supportive professional context is recommended so that EFL teachers are able to carry out their expected role and realise what they have been trained to do. Cooperation and respect are expected to prevail among EFL teachers as well as between teachers and their coordinators or supervisors. In addition, inspectors' and coordinators'/ supervisors' role in LPHS needs to be altered. Constructive feedback and consequently the improvement of the teachers' practice should be the ultimate concern of inspectors' and coordinators' classroom visits rather than evaluation. There should more interaction and discussion and less imposition from inspectors. A more dialogic feedback should exist between teachers and their coordinators, supervisors, or inspectors.

5.3.2 Education in Lebanon and the Arab World

Although this study has provided one possible explanation for the low EFL proficiency of LPHS graduates, it has also highlighted a lot of educational problems in LPHS that not only EFL teachers but also other subject teachers might have suffered from such as inadequate professional development, insufficient resources, students' background, syllabus and examination-driven school culture, authoritarian and hierarchical context, among others.

Such problems, as it seems, are not only restricted to the Lebanese context, but they are also common in almost all educational systems in the Arab World (Akkari, 2004; Elsayed, 2009; Faour, 2011). In fact, Elsayed (2009) attributes the failure of Arab educational systems to “the financial, human, cultural and other resources that this region has” (p.1). Faour (2011) relates the problem to the teaching process in most of the Arab countries which “continues to be highly didactic, teacher-directed, and not conducive to fostering analytical free thinking. ... [besides] a shortage of qualified teachers ... relatively low salaries and limited opportunities for professional development” (p. 2). Furthermore, Akkari (2004, p. 151) attributes the problem of the Arab educational systems to “bureaucratic structures that emphasise a top down approach to learning. ... rigid curriculum centred on memorisation and dictation as everyday activities”.

Based on what is presented above, the educational problems in Lebanon and the Arab World do not only relate to the availability of schools, resources, and teacher capacities, but they are also related to the centralised and authoritarian political and socio-economic systems. Thus, to ensure the success of any educational reform, reforms on the political and socio-economic systems need to be made. For example, corrupt and stagnant political systems, which reinforce bureaucracy and discourage creative thinking, need to be replaced by free democratic ones that help to foster independent, critical thinker citizens who seek and produce knowledge. According to Faour (2011), “Arab countries will only become economically competitive and relatively democratic if they start teaching youth to think critically and respect different points of view” (p. 1). When this is realised, we can

have democratic classrooms that encourage open discussion and active, participatory learning.

5.4 Reflections

5.4.1 Exemplary Knowledge

Although I cannot claim generalisation similar to all case study research, this study provides what Thomas (2011) calls exemplary knowledge, which is an

example viewed and heard in the context of another's experience ... but used in the context of one's own ...: the example is not taken to be representative, typical or standard, nor is it exemplary in the sense of being a model or an example. ... Rather, it is taken to be a particular representation given in context and understood in that context. However, it is interpretable only in the context of one's own experience ... of one's phronesis¹⁴, rather than one's theory. (p. 31)

In other words, this study presents exemplary knowledge, an example of some Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions of teaching and their practice that is experienced as well as interpreted by me through my phronesis as a researcher and an EFL teacher and that can be understood by the reader through his/her phronesis. Thus, as Thomas (2011) discussed, Lincoln and Guba's (1985, p. 124) 'transferability' and 'fittingness' in the case context come into play here with intersubjectivities between the reader and the researcher are emphasised. The reader makes connections between his/her experience and mine through the links or insights he/she can see in these two experiences. Such exemplary knowledge should be evaluated in terms of how much it contributed to one's understanding although it is "presented from another's 'horizon of meaning'" (Thomas, 2011, p. 32). The rich, thick descriptive data presented in this study should provide enough ground for the reader to discern to what extent my context is similar to his/hers, and hence the findings could relate/be transferred to his/her context.

This study has filled a gap in the literature as very few studies had researched Lebanese EFL teachers in LPHS. At least, it is the first study, to my knowledge, that has highlighted the disjuncture that exists between teacher education programmes and teachers' practice and needs in Lebanese EFL classrooms. While the findings of this study echo other

¹⁴ "practical reasoning, craft knowledge, or tacit knowledge: the ability to see the right thing to do in the circumstances" (Thomas, 2011, p. 23).

research findings done in different contexts, the findings of this research can serve as another piece of evidence that supports the influence of prior learning experiences on shaping teachers' conceptions of teaching as well as their practice. It can also be added to other studies that highlight the appropriateness and compatibility of the professional context with the curricular reforms to secure successful implementation of these reforms. Moreover, this study supports the decisive role teachers play in realising any educational reforms in classrooms. Without altering teachers' conceptions of teaching and equipping them with the necessary capacities, as well as resources to carry out the reforms, these reforms are likely to remain on paper and never be translated into teachers' classroom practice.

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Appendices:

Appendix A

Interview Questions

As I will be using semi-structured interviews, the questions below will be provisional, and I expect to do a lot of probing during the interviews.

I. Personal Data:

1. How old are you?
2. What degrees have you got that qualify you for your career?
3. How long have you been teaching?
4. How long have you been teaching in this school?

II. Data that feed into research questions:

1. Why did you choose “teaching” as your profession?
2. How did you choose to enter the profession?
3. Do you remember any of your previous English teachers? If so, what makes him/her so memorable?
4. Did you receive any kind of teacher preparation? If so, how can you describe it?
5. How about your in-service training?
6. How do you view your role as a teacher? What metaphor can picture your role?
7. To what extent are you able to realise that role in your classroom teaching practice?
Is there anything that impedes or facilitates the realisation of your perceived role?

In addition, the questions of the interviews that are conducted after classroom observations will be related to the teacher’s practice during the observed session.

Appendix B

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM FOR TEACHER PARTICIPANTS.

Title of Research: Lebanese EFL Teachers' Conceptions of Teaching and Their Classroom Practice in Lebanese Public High Schools (LPHS)

INFORMATION SHEET

This research study is taking place as part of my work towards the degree of Doctorate in Education (EdD) supported by the Department of Education and Social Work at the University of Sussex.

The study aims to investigate how Lebanese EFL teachers' conceptions (knowledge, beliefs, and thinking) of teaching influence their actual instructional practice in LPHS.

You have been selected to take part in the study along with five other EFL teachers in LPHS.

Your involvement will entail the following:

- Giving consent to the researcher to do multiple observations (5-6 times) in your class during the period of 4 months, between February and May. If you prefer to be notified before each observation, the researcher can do so one day earlier before observing your class.
- Agreeing to be interviewed after each session the researcher observes if you have the time for this; otherwise, these short interviews on what went in the classroom during the observed session can be scheduled at your convenience.
- Participating in one relatively long interview (about 60-75 minutes) at the beginning of the data collection process to get information about you and your conceptions of teaching. This one could be scheduled in your free time during a regular working day or any other time of your convenience. The interview will be taped only if you provide me with your consent to do so.
- The only cost on your part, I assume, is your time, which I really appreciate. I intend to share my research results, implications, and recommendations with officials at the National Centre for Research and Development (NCRD) in Lebanon, hoping this will be beneficial to you and the profession as a whole.

All information collected about you, your class, and the school will be kept strictly confidential (subject to legal limitations). In the collection, storage and publication of research material, the real name of the school, your real name and the real name of other participants will not be used, and strict confidentiality will be followed. The research design has been approved through the research ethics process of the School of Education

and Social Work at the University of Sussex. The results of the research will be used in a study which counts towards the degree of Doctorate in Education (EdD).

It is up to you to decide whether you may take part in this research or not. In case of not participating or withdrawing at any stage in the research study, you will not be disadvantaged in any way.

If you do agree to take part, please sign the consent form below. You are free to withdraw this permission at any time and without giving a reason.

If you wish to discuss this further before signing, please contact the researcher, whose contact details are listed below.

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Appendix C

A Sample of Interview Transcriptions and Observation Notes

Interview 1 with One Participant

Derived *themes* are written in *red*.

I. Personal Data:

1. How old are you?
R: 37 years old [age]
2. What degrees have you got that qualify you for your career?
R: A Bachelor degree (License) in English Literature from the Lebanese University [educational background], Faculty of Arts, a one-year Teaching Diploma from the Teacher Training Center, and (One intensive year) Kafaa degree from the Lebanese University Faculty of Education [pre-service]
3. How long have you been teaching?
R: 15 years [experience]
4. How long have you been teaching in this school?
R: This is my first year here. I used to teach in an intermediate school. I liked it much better [attitude to her previous school]. The students here especially in the secondary levels are discouraging.
N: IN WHAT WAY?
R: They are impolite and undisciplined. They cause a lot of disciplinary problems in class [students' discipline].

II. Data that feed into research questions:

5. Why did you choose “teaching” as your profession?
R: Because I like teaching [attitude to teaching/profession]; I enjoy it. Since grade 7, I decided to take this profession. I was influenced by my English teacher in Grade 7 [affected by her teacher].
N: How?
R: She used to be very calm, tolerant, and her personality motivated us to learn English. Her tolerance she was like a mother to us; she was very friendly, willing to listen to her students' personal problems [description of her memorable teacher].
N: So more like you. I saw you very calm in class today.
R: Sometimes I become nervous when students go beyond their limits, do things that you can't stand in class and can't figure out what to do [teacher personality in class].
N: Like what?
R: Like yesterday I had a student who was playing with his ... in the secondary class.
6. How did you choose to enter the profession?
R: Although my father who used to be an elementary teacher discouraged me advised me not to be a teacher, I took this profession [reason for joining teaching].
7. Do you remember any of your previous English teachers? If so, what makes him/her so memorable?

R: Yes. As I told you my Grade 7 teacher. I used to enjoy her sessions. She didn't shout in class [description of her memorable teacher].

8. Did you receive any kind of teacher preparation? If so, how can you describe it?

R: The training I received in the Teacher Training College was very helpful, introduced me to different teaching methods in general. We observed a lot of different classes and had to teach classes ourselves, do our practice teaching [pre-service training].

N: What course did you use to take?

R: Educational psychology, Arabic, English Grammar as I remember [pre-service training].

N: What about Kafaa Programme?

R: A higher level, more difficult. You do 2 research papers for most courses in addition to exams [attitude to Kafaa Programme].

N: Can you remember the courses you took. Were they the same as those in Teacher Training College?

R: Methodology (2 sessions/ week), curriculum design, syllabus analysis, educational Psychology, observation (45 hours), practice teaching (8-12 hours/ week), technology (how to implement technology into your teaching). In general, major courses are more emphasized than other courses [courses in Kafaa Programme].

N: How beneficial these were for you?

R: Not all. Methodology course which provides teaching methods according to skills such as how to teach reading/ writing/ listening/ etc. and integrating the skills was helpful. Also the classroom management course [attitude to Kafaa Programme]..

9. How about your in-service training?

R: I am the luckiest teacher. I was always selected to participate in workshops [in-service training].

N: Why?

R: Probably because I like to attend

N: How many workshops have you attended?

R: Attended 2 training sessions by NCERD. Each one lasted about 15-20 days [in-service training].

N: How can you evaluate these sessions?

R: VERY helpful. They introduced the new curriculum to us. There was a role play between trainers and teacher trainees. The trainers played the role of the teacher and we were the students. They introduced us to different techniques to use in our teaching [attitudes to in-service training].

N: Like what?

R: Cooperative learning techniques, jigsaw [CL].

N: How did you find the trainers?

R: I benefited from them [attitudes to in-service training].

N: Do you use these techniques you mentioned in your classes?

R: yes, I used to use them but not now because I am behind in my schedule [giving up CL for schedule/syllabus]. I joined this school late and I missed some time which I am working in compensating for these lost sessions.

N: Is that all about in-service training?

R: 2 Years ago, I attended another one about integration of skills; however, I felt it was a little repetitive [different attitudes to other in-service training].

10. How do you view your role as a teacher? What metaphor can picture your role?

R: My role Maybe a guide [view of teacher role].

N: Can you elaborate?

R: Build up their character, to be social members, preparing them for their future.

N: Is that all?

R: Provide knowledge [view of teacher role]

11. To what extent are you able to realise that role in your classroom teaching practice?

Is there anything that impedes or facilitates the realisation of your perceived role?

R: Aware of my role, but things that might hinder my realization {long pause} I don't know [admitting hindrances but hesitant to talk about].

Observation 1, Grade 7
School B

March, 2010

- On our first meeting, teacher complained about the textbooks; she said they had gaps [attitude towards textbooks], no grammar [poor understanding of the reforms]. She also talked about problems in class such as disciplinary problems and students' weak proficiency in English [students' background].
- Teacher repeats the lesson taught earlier probably to impress me. [Effect of observation].
- My presence distracted the students [Effect of observation].
- Some students in the back are talking to each other.
- Title is written on the board
- A series of questions on the reading selection, and many students answer enthusiastically in phrases in English [Students' talk].
- Teacher encourages other students to participate [students' role].
- Differentiation between travelling and tourism. Discussing different purposes for travelling, repetition of the definition to ensure students' understanding and memorization [drilling].
- Some students speak Arabic in class [use of Arabic], but teacher asks them to try in English [attitude of teacher to speaking Arabic in class].
- Teacher is very calm; she seems to have communicated her own codes and rules to her students. She signals to students that they have to raise their fingers before speaking or to keep quiet, etc. [teacher's personality in class].
- The teacher asks a confusing question about amusement centers, which none of the students was able to answer. I myself didn't get what she was asking about [teacher's competency].
- A few students were silent almost all the sessions [students' involvement]. Teacher asked more than one student who was silent almost all of the session to answer questions, but none was able to do it. [students' understanding and or proficiency]
- Teacher gives the meaning of the word "hospitable" in English, but doesn't give an example.
- Classroom: no pictures, no multimedia, just a chalkboard. Teacher's desk and chair are on the platform. 2 Students share the same desk, and their seats are attached to their desks, which make it difficult to rearrange. 21 benches are in the classroom, which indicates that group work activity might not be easy to be done in this classroom [Learning environment].
- Classroom was handled in lockstep [traditional mode of learning]. Interaction was one way; teacher asks and students respond in phrases [one-way interaction].
- Teacher drew a graphic organizer of the reviewed lesson [new technique].

- Instead of correcting the homework that was assigned, the teacher spent the whole session reviewing what has been explained earlier [**waste of time/ impact of my presence**].